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## The Last Seder and Yeshua's Passover Chronology

*J.K. McKee*

The season of Passover was my late father's favorite time of year, because being a licensed lay preacher at Christ United Methodist Church in Florence, KY, Holy Week was the time when he was able to conduct educational Passover *seders* and expose many evangelical Christians to their Hebraic Roots. Kimball McKee was able to show many how Jesus Christ held an intimate Passover *seder* meal with His Disciples prior to His death as the Lamb of God. He recited some of the various blessings, held up a piece of real unleavened bread or *matzah* to people who had never seen it before, and explained in a very edifying way the connection between the themes of the Exodus and the Messiah's work in delivering us from sin. The presentation would end with a communion service completely unlike what any of the attendees had ever participated in before.

I am very blessed to be able to think back on what my father did twenty years ago, in helping people see the relevance of Passover to their Christian faith. Looking at what has transpired since, especially that I am now a Bible teacher in the Messianic movement, the Passover is one of the most important aspects of our relationship with God. If we understand the Passover, we understand a huge part of His salvation history plan. Many Jewish people have been able to understand the sacrifice of Yeshua and His atoning work for sins, far more from the typological connections made via the traditional Passover *seder* than the standard Christian traditions of Holy Week. And, many Christians have been stimulated by the Holy Spirit to do far more than just attend a presentation on Passover, or even participate in the yearly *seder* of a local Messianic Jewish congregation—investigating their connection to the Torah and its commandments even further.

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No Messianic Believer today denies that the Exodus, Passover, and this season of deliverance is important to our faith. ***It is very important.*** But twenty years ago, the controversy that my father witnessed was that there would be a few dissenting voices in the local church about why Christians would be considering something “Jewish.” There would be people, obviously not attending his teaching presentation, who would very much frown upon evangelical Believers hearing about how the message of Jesus was seen in the Passover—even in spite of Paul’s own word, “Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed” (1 Corinthians 5:7). Today, in our Messianic faith community, while the relevance of the Passover is not at all questioned, we nevertheless do commonly face some controversies when the Spring holiday season arrives.

What kind of issues present themselves when the Passover season arrives? Would you believe that there are some people in the Messianic community today who do not believe that the Last Supper was a real, or even a kind-of, *seder* meal? How many of you have been engulfed in the argument that we need to do exactly what Yeshua did, and not any “traditions of men,”<sup>1</sup> making Passover a bit unexciting? While there are longstanding disagreements on *halachah* between the Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jewish traditions on what is kosher for Passover, think about some of the new Messianic disagreements that have arisen on what actually took place in those days leading up to Yeshua’s betrayal and execution. How long is three days and three nights? Was the Messiah really crucified, or put to death another way? And this is only a short list of what often gets discussed...

Reasonable theological inquiry and discussion are things that are very good, and as a teacher I encourage them. Every maturing Believer has a responsibility to go to the Biblical text, and do his or her best to interpret what is read, and when appropriate consider the relevant extra-Biblical histories or opinions of trusted scholarship. The challenge with today’s Messianic generation, though, is that this is often not achieved. Because of the easy access to information on the Internet, blogs, YouTube, or discussion forums—many people, *including congregational leaders*, get their teachings from less-than-reliable sources. There might be a few things quite necessary for the discussion that get left out, as they may not be found in electronic venues, but rather in (expensive) physical books. Because of this, Messianic leaders and teachers may find the Passover season to have some “issues,” which in the past might not have been issues.

Many Messianic congregations and fellowships truly make Passover into a blessed time for all who are involved. Jewish Believers get to once again connect with various traditions and customs that are familiar to them, being a

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<sup>1</sup> I personally prefer the more inclusive language rendering of *tēn paradōsin tōn anthrōpōn* (τῆν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων) as “human tradition(s)” (Mark 7:8; Colossians 2:8, NRSV/TNIV).

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part of their childhood. Non-Jewish Believers get to consider the Exodus and the deliverance of Ancient Israel in a much more tangible way, that simply reading something from Scripture does not fully convey. **Everybody gets to see connections to the gospel message of salvation, that they did not get to see before.** Some get to see aspects of deliverance and freedom, beyond that of just salvation from sin—such as helping the oppressed or impoverished—that they might not have thought of. Most of today's Messianics, including myself, do believe that the Last Supper was some kind of a Passover *seder* meal. For many of those same, when we "eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Corinthians 11:28), we are reminded of many meaningful and supernatural things at such a solemn point in our commemoration.

I will not hide the truth from you: there are debates among interpreters as to what actually took place in the final moments prior to Yeshua's arrest. No one is fully agreed as to whether or not the Last Supper was a *seder* meal, or the exact day on which the Lord was executed. There are disputes over whether three days and three nights is a full 72 hours, a little over 36 hours, or some other time interval. Some of today's Messianic leaders (even myself at times), quite sadly, have looked at the Passover season with a little bit of dread—not because of its great themes of salvation from sin, deliverance from bondage, etc.—but because there will be debates over issues like the Passover chronology, which in all likelihood may never be fully solved. *They want the Passover week to end as quickly as possible*, and get back to the normal routine. (Of course, even this is a bit of wishful thinking, considering the fifty-day counting of the *omer*, and whether it is to begin on the 16th of Nisan or the first Sunday after the weekly Sabbath of Unleavened Bread.)

We may not have all of the information that we need to support, with one-hundred percent accuracy, the opinions which we hold. And what happens when we get so focused on the minutiae of the chronology of the Last Supper, trial, execution, and resurrection of the Lord? **We run the risk of forgetting about the substance of what took place.** It is a salvation requirement that we affirm that Yeshua died and was resurrected (Romans 10:9); it is not a salvation requirement that we affirm that it took place on a particular day of the week, or even at a specific hour, minute, and second of the day.

I want all of us as Messianic Believers to step back from our opinions for a moment, and *focus first* on what we can agree upon. I think we can all agree that the substance of what we need to be considering is found in Peter's summary,

"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Yeshua the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this

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*Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power” (Acts 2:22-24).

We all agree that believing in the sacrificial death and resurrection of Messiah Yeshua is what is essential to our faith. I would submit that our attention during this season of Passover needs to be focused more on the severity of what took place, **so we do not forget what the Lord has accomplished for us.** *If* we can all recognize how He was scourged for our transgressions (Isaiah 53:5), then we should be able to reasonably offer some proposals for how it took place. The patterns of prophetic fulfillment admittedly might not be found in some nice little package with a big bow, or seen in a chart with 0 and 1s accuracy. We have to consider the perspectives of all four Gospels, and also recognize that Twentieth and Twenty-First Century vantage points of specificity are not the same as those of ancient times. We also have to recognize the uniqueness of the year Yeshua died for us, and how in the years following things returned to their relatively normal routine.

This article will consider various aspects of what many call the “Passion Week,” or the final days before Yeshua’s execution: the Last Supper meal, His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, His trial and humiliation, and His crucifixion and death, then followed by His resurrection. While I will be interjecting some of my own thoughts and opinions as to how and when this took place, we should be more concerned with recapturing an appreciation *for what actually occurred*, recognizing the timing of it as secondary.

During the Passover season, some of today’s Messianic teachers and leaders could make all sorts of pulpit-pounding conclusions regarding Yeshua’s Passover chronology—but not enough reflective thoughts on what He endured for us, and how we should live in response to His atoning work as faithful men and women of God, will probably be offered. *We should hope to see this trend altered.* It should be our desire to probe the multiple aspects of how Paul asserts, “Messiah died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and...He was buried, and...He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3).

## The Lamb of God

A significantly important theme that controls how we look at Yeshua’s death is the explicit assertion that He is the Lamb of God. As John the Immerser declared, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). When we commonly think of sheep, we think of poor, helpless, and defenseless animals being ruthlessly killed by some kind of Big Bad Wolf—but that is not the image that the Scriptures intend to portray of

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Yeshua the Messiah. I.H. Marshall points out, "The description of Jesus as the Lamb of God belongs to the language of sacrifice which is no longer common currency today."<sup>2</sup> People who would be closely acquainted with the Levitical priesthood and prescribed animal sacrifices of the Torah, would be those most apt to make the appropriate typological connections between Yeshua as the Lamb of God, and what He has accomplished for us on the cross.

The first claim of Yeshua being the Lamb of God does not appear in a Passover-specific setting, although Isaiah's Suffering Servant being a "guilt offering" (Isaiah 53:10; Heb. *asham*, אֲשָׁם) could be what is in view. It is undeniable that later in the Gospel of John, a direct appeal is made between Yeshua's sacrifice and the Torah's instructions regarding the lamb killed at Passover:

"For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, 'NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN'" (John 19:36).

"It is to be eaten in a single house; you are not to bring forth any of the flesh outside of the house, nor are you to break any bone of it" (Exodus 12:46).

"They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break a bone of it; according to all the statute of the Passover they shall observe it" (Numbers 9:12).<sup>3</sup>

An interesting connection between Yeshua's sacrifice and the Passover lamb can also be seen between the jar of sour wine and the hyssop used by the Ancient Israelites:

"A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a *branch* of hyssop and brought it up to His mouth" (John 19:29).

"You shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and the two doorposts; and none of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning" (Exodus 12:22).

There are some parallels that are intended to be made between what occurred to Yeshua's body, and the killing of the original Passover lambs in

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<sup>2</sup> I.H. Marshall, "Lamb of God," in Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 433.

<sup>3</sup> See also Psalm 34:20.

Cf. Kurt Aland, et. al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1998), 399.

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Exodus. Of the four Gospels, John or the Fourth Gospel makes the point of portraying the Messiah as the One who accomplishes the grand fulfillment of what the original Passover lambs at the time of the Exodus could only foreshadow. As Paul M. Hoskins summarizes,

"The Passover context (19:14) and the mention of hyssop (19:29; Exod 12:22) are followed by the preservation of Jesus' legs from being broken and the piercing of his side (19:31-34). The blood of Jesus and the body/flesh of Jesus are both prominent in John's picture of Jesus on the cross. Given such a context, the Scripture quote in 19:36, 'a bone of him/it will not be broken' surely points to Exod 12:10, 46 and Num 9:12, even if it may also point to Ps 34:20. Thus Jesus' fulfillment of Scripture here signifies his fulfillment of the Passover lamb with respect to his body. The blood flowing out from his side also points to his fulfillment of the Passover lamb, whose blood is poured out."<sup>4</sup>

There are other places in the Apostolic Scriptures, of course, which make connections between Yeshua's sacrificial death and the Passover lamb. When Philip encounters the Ethiopian, he is seen reading from the Book of Isaiah: "Now the passage of Scripture which he was reading was this: 'HE WAS LED AS A SHEEP TO SLAUGHTER; AND AS A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE DOES NOT OPEN HIS MOUTH'" (Acts 8:32; cf. Isaiah 53:7). Philip asks him, "Do you understand what you are reading?", and is simply told, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" (Acts 8:30, 31). When further asked, "Please *tell me*, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?", "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Yeshua to him" (Acts 8:34, 35).

The Apostle Paul uses the image of Yeshua's sacrifice as Passover Lamb, and the themes of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, to motivate his Corinthian audience to ethical maturity. He writes them, "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of *dough*? Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are *in fact* unleavened. For Messiah our Passover also has been sacrificed" (1 Corinthians 5:6-7). Their response to the sacrifice of the Lord should be one of fully changing any of their previous, ungodly habits: "Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people" (1 Corinthians 5:8-9). When the Corinthians come together for their Passover meal, they are to really

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<sup>4</sup> Paul M. Hoskins, "Deliverance from Death by the True Passover Lamb: A Significant Aspect of the Fulfillment of the Passover in the Gospel of John" in Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society Vol. 52 No. 2 (2009):296.

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consider how Yeshua's sacrifice for them is to motivate them to be holy and upstanding.

The theme of a lamb sacrificed is revisited later by John in the Book of Revelation, where Yeshua as the Lamb possesses extreme authority over the universe. This Lamb who was slain is given great glory and worship for what He has done, and what He is able to do, on behalf of the saints:

"And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth. And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints...Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.' And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, 'To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, *be* blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.' And the four living creatures kept saying, 'Amen.' And the elders fell down and worshiped" (Revelation 5:6-8, 11-14).

Today's evangelical Christians, and even Messianic Believers, often take for granted what it means for us to consider Yeshua the Messiah as the sacrificed Lamb of God. It is not only to motivate us to consider our human frailties and faults, driving us to our knees in worship—but it is also to really cause us to consider how as a man, Yeshua was brutally murdered for no just cause. Just as an innocent lamb would have to be killed, so was our Lord.

As important as the theme of Yeshua as the Lamb of God is for us as people of faith, we may not be aware of how there might be a slight theological issue with assuming that Yeshua's Passover sacrifice can suffice as a guilt offering. At the Last Supper He held with the Disciples, the Lord did say, "this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28; cf. Mark 14:24).<sup>5</sup> Yeshua's own claim is that the death He would soon experience would offer people a release from the punishment of sins. From the Torah, there are general instructions that we can consider in relation to animal sacrifice as they pertain to a sin offering (i.e., Leviticus 4:7; 17:3), that can be typologically connected to what Yeshua

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<sup>5</sup> Yeshua's words in Luke 22:20 are even more specific: "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood."

Consult the article "What is the New Covenant?" by J.K. McKee.

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did at Golgotha. This is actually not the challenge. The possible issue is that corporate atonement and release from sins is to take place at *Yom Kippur* (Leviticus 16:34). Can Yeshua's sacrifice for humanity at Passover *also* fulfill the sacrificial expectations of the Day of Atonement?

Yeshua's sacrifice is definitely portrayed in the Scriptures as being something that is unique. 1 Peter 1:18-19 tells us, "you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Messiah." The shed blood of the Messiah, permanently covering sins, does take the place of any animal sacrifice of the Torah, which at best could temporarily cover sin. Hebrews 9:26 asserts, "now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." In fact, it can be rightfully thought that Yeshua's sacrifice offering permanent atonement for sins in place of animal sacrifices, is a reverse of how an animal sacrifice was offered in place of Isaac.

One of the reasons the Patriarch Abraham had great faith in God, is how he was prepared to fully go through with God's request to sacrifice his son, who was the child of promise (Genesis 21:12; Hebrews 11:18). Hebrews 11:19 says, "He considered that God is able to raise *people* even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type." Abraham did not kill Isaac, but as he told his son, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering" (Genesis 22:8), and this is exactly what we see occur: "Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind *him* a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son" (Genesis 22:13). While the scene of Isaac's sacrifice is Mount Moriah in the future city of Jerusalem (Genesis 22:2), we are not given any clue as to when this actually took place. But what we do know is that Isaac's being substituted by a lamb/ram is a "figure" (Hebrews 11:19, KJV) depicting how the Messiah was to come and die.

When we consider what it means for something found in the Messiah's ministry to prophetically fulfill something seen in the Tanach Scriptures, what we primarily look for is that how God has acted in past history is manifested once again in the life and actions of the Messiah. A past event is to connect us to a unique activity the Messiah performs, but obviously the unique activity—while being continuous with a past activity—could not be unique unless there were something at least slightly different about it. This is where we have to consider how modern-day Western attitudes about "fulfillment" are not necessarily those of the ancients. It is easy for a critic of the Bible, or even a liberal theologian, to claim that Yeshua's death during the season of Passover would only fulfill the expectations of Passover. Yet Jews of the First Century could have seen it as being much more.

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The First Century historian Josephus, writing about the Exodus, states how "when the fourteenth day was come, and all were ready to depart they offered the sacrifice, and purified their houses with the blood, using bunches of hyssop for that purpose, and when they had supped, they burnt the remainder of the flesh, when just ready to depart" (*Antiquities of the Jews* 2.312).<sup>6</sup> The sacrifice of the Passover lamb cleansed the homes of the Ancient Israelites. The background behind this cleansing of the houses, as provided by Josephus, could be Ezekiel 45:18-20:

"Thus says the Lord GOD, 'In the first *month*, on the first of the month, you shall take a young bull without blemish and cleanse the sanctuary. The priest shall take some of the blood from the sin offering and put *it* on the door posts of the house, on the four corners of the ledge of the altar and on the posts of the gate of the inner court. Thus you shall do on the seventh *day* of the month for everyone who goes astray or is naive; so you shall make atonement for the house.'

Here, just as purification is offered for the homes of the Ancient Israelites at Passover (Exodus 12:27), so does the *Yom Kippur* sacrifice provide an atonement for God's House (Ezekiel 45:20; with the verb *kafar*, כָּפַר actually employed in the text). Would it have been difficult for a First Century Jew to consider Yeshua's sacrifice for humanity at Passover, to in some degree accomplish the expectations of atonement for *Yom Kippur*—a sacred day which occurs seven months later? At least one First Century Jew, the author of Hebrews, had no problem recognizing that Yeshua's Passover sacrifice was "offered once to bear the sins of many," although He does acknowledge more on the salvation historical agenda: "[He] will appear a second time for salvation without *reference to sin*, to those who eagerly await Him" (Hebrews 9:28; cf. 10:12).<sup>7</sup>

Recognizing that Yeshua's sacrifice has prophetic ramifications beyond that of just Passover is possible not only because of the supremacy of God, but most especially because of how important the Exodus, the original Passover lambs, and God's deliverance of Ancient Israel from Egypt were to Second Temple Judaism. Up until the sacrifice of Yeshua, the major event that would have clearly defined Jewish identity would have been the Exodus. Following the sacrifice of Yeshua, Messianic Jewish identity—and indeed the identity for *all* of God's people on this side of the cross—would primarily have to be focused around Yeshua's atoning work. It is with this in mind that I think Paul says in Romans 3:21-22,

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<sup>6</sup> Flavius Josephus: *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. William Whiston (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 74.

<sup>7</sup> This obviously concerns the Second Coming and resurrection of the dead.

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“But now {in an event} apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Yeshua the Messiah [or: the faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah, CJB]<sup>8</sup> for all those who believe; for there is no distinction.”

So great is God’s righteousness manifested in Yeshua’s sacrifice—something independent of, but surely expected by the Torah and the Prophets—that it has the capacity to reverse the effects of all people sinning (cf. Romans 3:23), with none having to perish (John 3:16).

Yeshua’s sacrifice for humanity does occur during the season of Passover, and is intended to be connected to the Passover lamb. Yet it has effects which reach far beyond Passover, and into *Yom Kippur* or the Day of Atonement. While Western people might require Yeshua to have been sacrificed at *Yom Kippur* to fulfill the requirements of *Yom Kippur*, we have just cause to consider that the Passover sacrifice of the lamb is so significant, that it is **the prototype of all of the other animal sacrifices** which follow in the Torah. Hoskins notes how “Some conclude...that the Passover lamb was perceived by some first-century Jews, like John and Josephus, to be an atoning sacrifice.”<sup>9</sup> If there is a major event that can prophetically fulfill the Passover sacrifice, then it stands to reason that such a sacrifice will have a resonating effect into the other sacrifices that are to be offered during the other appointed times. Hoskins offers us a good paragraph, further describing,

“Old Testament support for such a belief comes to light if one regards the Passover sacrifice (Exod 12:27) as a prototypical sacrifice. Then, sacrifices instituted later help somewhat in the interpretation of the character of the Passover sacrifice. The original Passover sacrifice consecrates or sanctifies the firstborn sons and animals so that they now belong to God (Num 3:13). Similarly, the ordination ram used in the sanctification of the priests, part of which they eat, is associated with making atonement for them (Exod 29:33). Hyssop appears elsewhere with respect to blood rites that cleanse from impurity and sin. In general, sacrifices, including peace offerings that resemble the Passover sacrifice, contribute to atonement even if some are more closely associated with it than others. The yearly sacrifice of the Passover in the Temple gives it a place in the sacrificial system, where atonement is a central concern and may suggest something about the original Passover (Deut 16:2). Finally, the Passover sacrifice spared the firstborn from a plague sent from God (Exod 12:12-13). Deliverance from a plague sent from God is elsewhere associated with atonement [Exod 30:11-16; Num 16:41-50,

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<sup>8</sup> Grk. *dia pisteōs Iēsou Christou* (διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).

Consult the article “The Faithfulness of Yeshua the Messiah” by J.K. McKee.

<sup>9</sup> Hoskins, in *JETS*, 52:287.

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25:7-13]. In light of this evidence, one can see why at least some Jews, like John and Josephus, could regard the Passover lamb as significant for atonement."<sup>10</sup>

It is quite important to recognize how imperative the controlling themes of the Passover and the Exodus were for Ancient Israel and Second Temple Judaism (cf. Acts 13:17; Jude 5)—as opposed to the themes of *Yom Kippur*, as important as they were. Yeshua's sacrifice had to be something **more significant** than Ancient Israel's deliverance from Egypt. As such, Yeshua as the Lamb of God does not only fulfill the sacrificial expectations of all of the appointed times by His single offering at Passover, but He also came to take away the sins of "the world" (John 1:29), and not just an exclusive segment of humanity. While that Jewish segment of humanity is surely to be honored (John 4:22), the Exodus and the supreme sacrifice of Yeshua as Passover Lamb affects everyone (1 Corinthians 10:1).

Also not to be overlooked, is that while Yeshua as the Lamb of God has fulfilled the sacrificial requirements of Passover and the appointed times, *more prophetic fulfillment* does await us in regard to the Passover as the Second Coming approaches (cf. Hebrews 9:28b).

### The Last Supper

The Last Supper is one of the most spiritually significant parts of the Bible for those who have received Yeshua into their lives as Savior. In this scene depicted—from various vantage points in the Gospels—we witness a very intimate meal that our Master and Teacher holds with His Disciples, before later being arrested and executed by the Romans. While some Bible readers do wonder about what was being served and passed around at the table, what immediately jumps out at any of us is the Lord's claim, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me—one who is eating with Me" (Mark 14:18; cf. Matthew 26:21). The response, "Surely not I, Lord?" (Matthew 26:22; cf. Mark 14:19) grabs our attention, as does Yeshua's slightly ambiguous remark, "*It is* one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl" (Mark 14:20; cf. Matthew 26:23). Admittedly for many Christians who have read about the Last Supper, their thoughts are probably focused a little more on how they know Judas Iscariot will be controlled by the Devil to betray the Messiah (Mark 14:21; Matthew 26:24-25; Luke 22:22; John 13:26-27). This is to be expected, because it forms a major part of the unfolding drama of history, and how the Lord's death would atone for humanity's sin.

Perhaps one of the most important things that draws evangelical Christians into the Messianic movement are the connections made between

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 52:287-288.

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the Last Supper and the traditional Passover *seder* (סדר). When Christians begin to think of the bread and wine at the Last Supper as not just being any bread and wine, but actually the common elements of the Passover meal—they probably have enough knowledge of the Ancient Israelites' Exodus from Egypt to see the relevance. The Messiah is not just not dying some random death for the sins of the world, but He has arrived on the scene at a moment in history that is to offer a kind of deliverance that the original Passover and Exodus—as important as they are—can only shadow. In Craig S. Keener's estimation, "By identifying his own mission with the Passover, Jesus indicates that he has come to enact the new redemption and new exodus promised by the prophets."<sup>11</sup>

Since the 1980s, more and more Christians have been attending Passover *seders*, either at a local Messianic congregation, or when a Messianic congregational leader holds one at his or her church. It has helped many Believers appreciate their spiritual heritage in the Torah, as well as their Jewish Roots. *They learn a great deal more about who the Jewish Jesus really is.* Furthermore, for those evangelical Believers who later become Messianic, the Passover is often a very special time—as they really get to consider not only the blessings of their salvation in Yeshua, but frequently how the themes of Passover got them to consider the further blessings of becoming Torah obedient.

Because of the special place that the original Passover and Exodus, and the Last Supper or *Seder*, hold for most of today's Messianic Believers, it comes as quite a shock when people hear views about the Last Supper not being some kind of Passover commemoration. The view of many in liberal scholarship is that the portrayal of the Last Supper as a kind of *seder* meal is one that is theological, not historical (cf. Mark 14:12-17; Matthew 26:17-20; Luke 22:7-14). Bruce Chilton concludes, "Recent scholarship has rightly seen that the identification of the Last Supper with Passover is theologically motivated...The basic elements of the Seder—lamb, unleavened bread, bitter herbs (see Exodus 12:8)—are notably absent at the Last Supper."<sup>12</sup> Chilton instead points to the Last Supper being one of the many Jewish *chavurot* or fellowship meals, attendant with bread and wine or *kiddush*, and for the Messiah how "eating socially with others in Israel was a parable of the feast in the kingdom that was to come."<sup>13</sup> Suffice it to say, the argument that the Last Supper meal of Yeshua was not really a Passover *seder* has been gaining some

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<sup>11</sup> Craig S. Keener, *IVP New Testament Commentary Series: Matthew* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 367.

<sup>12</sup> Bruce Chilton, "What Jesus Did at the Last Supper," in Molly Dewsnap Meinhardt, ed., *Jesus: The Last Day* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2003), 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

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adherence. What this means in practice is that when some Messianic congregations and fellowships get together for their Passover commemoration—it is only to remember the original Passover—and not really any of the events surrounding the death and resurrection of the Lord.

No commentator reading the Gospels denies the fact that the three Synoptics consider the Last Supper meal to be a Passover *seder* (Mark 14:12; Matthew 16:17; Luke 22:7), but the Gospel of John states that Yeshua was sacrificed on “the day of preparation for the Passover” (John 19:14). Some choose to take John’s statement as implying that the Last Supper meal was not a *seder*, and consider what the Synoptics have to say as not being quite accurate, or just being in outright error. Others, believing that all four Gospels are trustworthy accounts of the events, think that there is probably another solution to be found.

Anyone reading Mark 14:12-17; Matthew 16:17-20; Luke 22:7-14; and John chs. 13-17 can recognize how the three Synoptics briefly state that some kind of religious meal was held, and how the Fourth Gospel fills us in on some of the teaching and discussion that took place during this meal. But was this just a special fellowship meal, with regular leavened bread and wine, or was it something rather unique? R.H. Stein describes, “If, as has been maintained, the Last Supper took place at a Passover meal, any proper interpretation must seek to understand it in light of this particular context. The Passover was an elaborate ritual full of symbolism and redemptive history....As the host of the Last Supper, Jesus would have been the one who retold the story.”<sup>14</sup>

A significant Passover *seder*, held with His Disciples, is exactly what we should conclude took place—especially given the Lord’s assertion, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15). Unless we look at Yeshua’s reference to “eat” as something other than holding some kind of Passover meal, and deny that all of the Gospels include reliable history, then the Disciples really did hold a Passover *seder* with their Rabbi.

If Yeshua and His Disciples held a Passover *seder* for their Last Supper together, then this should be easily detectable from what is seen at their table. The three Synoptic Gospels of Mark,<sup>15</sup> Matthew, and Luke all succinctly record what takes place:

“As they were reclining *at the table* and eating, Yeshua said, ‘Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me—one who is eating with Me.’ They

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<sup>14</sup> R.H. Stein, “Last Supper,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 447.

<sup>15</sup> Note how many New Testament theologians are in agreement that the Gospel of Mark was written first, and then expanded by Matthew in his Gospel composition.

Consult the entries for Mark and Matthew in *A Survey of the Apostolic Scriptures for the Practical Messianic* by J.K. McKee.

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began to be grieved and to say to Him one by one, 'Surely not I?' And He said to them, '*It is* one of the twelve, one who dips with Me in the bowl. For the Son of Man *is to* go just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! *It would have been* good for that man if he had not been born.' While they were eating, He took *some* bread, and after a blessing He broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, and said, 'Take *it*; this is My body.' And when He had taken a cup *and* given thanks, He gave *it* to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, 'This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God'" (Mark 14:18-25).

"Now when evening came, Yeshua was reclining *at the table* with the twelve disciples. As they were eating, He said, 'Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me.' Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, 'Surely not I, Lord?' And He answered, 'He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me. The Son of Man *is to* go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.' And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, 'Surely it is not I, Rabbi?' Yeshua said to him, 'You have said *it* yourself.' While they were eating, Yeshua took *some* bread, and after a blessing, He broke *it* and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.' After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (Matthew 26:20-30).

"When the hour had come, He reclined *at the table*, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' And when He had taken a cup *and* given thanks, He said, 'Take this and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes.' And when He had taken *some* bread *and* given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' And in the same way *He took* the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood. But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Mine on the table. For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!' And they began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing. And there arose also a dispute among them *as to* which one of them was regarded to be greatest. And He said to them, 'The kings

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of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called "Benefactors." But *it is* not this way with you, but the one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines *at the table* or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines *at the table*? But I am among you as the one who serves. You are those who have stood by Me in My trials; and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded *permission* to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.' But he said to Him, 'Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!' And He said, 'I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me.' And He said to them, 'When I sent you out without money belt and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything, did you?' They said, 'No, nothing.' And He said to them, 'But now, whoever has a money belt is to take it along, likewise also a bag, and whoever has no sword is to sell his coat and buy one. For I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, "AND HE WAS NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS" [Isaiah 53:12]; for that which refers to Me has *its* fulfillment.' They said, 'Lord, look, here are two swords.' And He said to them, 'It is enough.' And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him" (Luke 22:14-39).

What is narrated in the three Synoptic Gospels is obviously more concerned about how Yeshua is on the verge of being betrayed, via a conspiracy brought about by one of His own Twelve Disciples, than anything else. How can this be? How can someone who has spent more than three years with the Messiah, and who has seen Him perform miracles, cast out demons, walk on water, and exert supernatural power—**now deliver Him over to be murdered?** The reader is naturally inclined to think about *why* this would take place. The details of the kind of meal that Yeshua and His Disciples held, while important, are perhaps only a side feature of the events that are about to occur.

In conducting a Passover *seder* with His Disciples, then there are some serious typological connections that can be made regarding what Yeshua is about to experience in being betrayed and later murdered. For certain, the Lord's table included bread, wine, and some kind of dipping. But were these truly the elements of a *seder* meal, or just an ordinary meal?

There are aspects of the Last Supper which correspond to the customs witnessed in a traditional Jewish *seder* meal of the First Century, including:

- the meal is held within the city of Jerusalem (m.*Pesachim* 7:9)

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- those present at the meal are reclining (Mark 14:18; Matthew 26:20; Luke 22:14; cf. m.*Pesachim* 10:1)
- the meal is held in the evening (Mark 14:17; cf. 1 Corinthians 11:23), as required by the Torah (Exodus 12:8)
- there are blessings over bread and wine (Mark 14:22-23; Matthew 26:26-27; Luke 22:17-19), a definite feature of the *seder* (m.*Pesachim* 10:2-3), including the drinking of the cup after the meal (m.*Pesachim* 10:6-7), likely the third cup of the *seder*, the Cup of Redemption
- the dipping into the bowl of salt water was a feature of the *seder*, including the bitter herbs and *charoset* (Mark 14:20; Matthew 26:23; cf. m.*Pesachim* 10:3)
- Yeshua's reference to His body and blood is likely reworked, or an addition to, the traditional Passover liturgy (Mark 14:22-24; Matthew 26:26-28; Luke 22:19-20; cf. m.*Pesachim* 10:5-6)
- the gathering is concluded with the singing of some kind of hymn (Mark 14:26; Matthew 26:30), and the Hallel (Psalms 115-118) is a part of the *seder's* conclusion (m.*Pesachim* 10:6-7)<sup>16</sup>

While some of the details of the meal can seem a bit ambiguous, the testimony of Luke 22:15 is rather clear that when Yeshua sat down to eat, that He ate a Passover with His Disciples: "I have longed to eat this Passover with you before my death!" (NEB). And notably, this was the last Passover *seder* in which Yeshua partook, until His future arrival in the Kingdom: "for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16)—a very good indication that *beyond* the events of His death and resurrection, the Exodus and Passover account have important elements related to the Second Coming to be considered.

Even though Yeshua Himself says that the meal which He and the Disciples held was a Passover commemoration, there are some common objections made to it being some kind of *seder*. The three main elements of the *seder* would be "Passover {lamb}, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs" (m.*Pesachim* 10:5).<sup>17</sup> It is sometimes thought that while bitter herbs for Passover could be implied from the dipping into a bowl, that the other two elements are missing from this meal.

Proof for this conclusion is first made from the assumption that *matzah* (מַצֵּה) or "unleavened bread" is rendered in the Septuagint (LXX) with *azumos* (ἄζυμος), but in all three Synoptics the more common word for bread, *artos*

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<sup>16</sup> Stein also adds how the giving of money to the poor (John 13:29) was common at Passover ("Last Supper," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 446).

<sup>17</sup> Neusner, *Mishnah*, 250.

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(ἄρτος), is employed for the scene of the Last Supper.<sup>18</sup> *Artos* can be used for leavened bread, but then again it can just be a general term for bread either leavened or unleavened, and in a classical context meant "a cake or loaf of wheat-bread" (*LS*).<sup>19</sup> It is a mistake, though, for one to think that just because the more general term for "bread" is employed in the Synoptics that only leavened bread is intended. Stein points out how "The general term for 'bread,' whether the Greek *artos* or Hebrew *lehem* [לֶחֶם], was always used in the OT, the LXX, the Mishnah and the Targums to describe the shewbread, which consisted of unleavened bread."<sup>20</sup> Josephus actually referred to the shewbread as "twelve unleavened loaves of bread"<sup>21</sup> (*Antiquities of the Jews* 3.142).<sup>22</sup>

The other objection is that there is no specific reference to the eating of a Passover lamb, a definite feature of the *seder*. Yet, is this really proof that the meal was not a *seder*? Not at all. We do know that Jewish communities in the Diaspora would have observed Passover without the availability of a lamb slaughtered in Jerusalem, but certainly would have had the elements of unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Still, the omission of mentioning the lamb does not mean that it was not there. In fact, we have good reason to believe that a lamb was present for Yeshua's Last Supper. As Mark 14:12 points out, "On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover *lamb* was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, 'Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?'" The Messiah held His meal during the period of this sacrificing,<sup>23</sup> a period of killing lambs that likely included not only the first day of the Passover week, but also some time immediately before—given the sheer amount of time it would take to properly handle the many tens of thousands of lambs which needed to be sacrificed.<sup>24</sup> Suffice it to say, it would

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<sup>18</sup> Mark 14:22; Matthew 26:26; Luke 22:19.

<sup>19</sup> H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 121.

<sup>20</sup> Stein, "Last Supper," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 446.

<sup>21</sup> Grk. *artous te dōdeka azumous* (ἄρτους τε δώδεκα ἄζυμους).

<sup>22</sup> *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, 88.

<sup>23</sup> Grk. *thuō* (θύω).

<sup>24</sup> Josephus (*Jewish War* 9.424) records how at one Passover there were as many as 256,500 lambs slain for the over 2,700,200 people in the environs of Jerusalem. Even if these numbers are a bit exaggerated, and the actual number of lambs was closer to the tens of thousands—it would probably have still taken more than 24 hours to appropriately slaughter lambs for all those who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover. The process probably involved some kind of spot check by the priest(s), a short prayer, and then the ritual killing, taking at least several minutes per lamb.

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have simply been understood—with all of the sacrificing going on—that Yeshua and His Disciples probably had a lamb.<sup>25</sup>

When denying that the Last Supper was a *seder* meal, the main alternative that interpreters have is in choosing to conclude that it was just a fellowship meal. The elements of bread and wine, while common to the *seder*, were apparently the common Jewish practice of *kiddush*. Stein rightly objects to the Last Supper just being some kind of *kiddush* meal. He observes, “The suggestion that the Last Supper was a *qiddûš*...and included a blessing over the bread and cup seems highly unlikely due to the numerous associations of the Last Supper with the Passover celebration. Indeed, the traditional materials which inform us about the *qiddûš* are post-Christian...There is even a question as to whether the *qiddûš* was an actual meal or simply a blessing pronounced at a meal.”<sup>26</sup> While the standard liturgy of “Blessed are You Lord our God...” is present in both the practice of *kiddush* and the Passover *seder*, there is simply too much in the Gospels that points to the Last Supper being a special Passover meal.

While Yeshua certainly held a Passover *seder* with His Disciples, there can be no doubting that it was not just a simple retelling of the Exodus story—with a few snippets here and there about His ministry. The very reason the Lord was so eager to have this meal with His Disciples, was to explain to them important realities about the Kingdom of Heaven. John chs. 13-17 inform us about some of the things that make the Last Supper rather unique, and the specific teachings Yeshua issued to His Disciples, as when He was gone they would be left to continue on with the mission. The Fourth Gospel details the important things that took place:

- Yeshua washed the Disciples’ feet (John 13:5-20)
- Yeshua predicted His betrayal (John 13:21-38)
- Yeshua comforted His Disciples (John 14:1-6)
- Yeshua affirmed His oneness with the Father (John 14:7-15)
- Yeshua informed His Disciples that the Holy Spirit would come to them (John 14:16-31; 16:5-15)
- Yeshua described Himself as the Vine, and His followers as the branches (John 15:1-11)
- Yeshua told His Disciples about what it meant to love one another (John 15:12-17)

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<sup>25</sup> It does have to be mentioned that following the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., the traditional Jewish *seder* was frequently observed without the lamb. In the Ashkenazic Jewish tradition especially up until modern times, lamb is not eaten at all during the season of Passover, and during the *seder* meal is often substituted by poultry.

<sup>26</sup> Stein, “Last Supper,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pp 446-447.

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- Yeshua told His Disciples what it would mean for the world to hate them (John 15:18-16:4)
- Yeshua informed His Disciples about His death and resurrection (John 16:16-22)
- Yeshua spoke to His Disciples about the need for them to pray (John 16:23-33), then offering forth a long prayer on their behalf to the Father (John 17)

Many Believers today read this section of the Gospel of John because of important verses they find such as:

- "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).
- "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6).
- "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).
- "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:20-21).

How many of us forget that these things, and many others, were actually spoken by Yeshua to His Disciples during their conversations at the Last Supper and immediately afterward? The main theme of the Last Supper gathering is what the Disciples are supposed to do once their Lord is gone. When understood that this all took place during the midst of a Passover *seder*—with the elements of a *seder* all around them—it certainly should have caused them, and should cause *us today*, to take serious notice!

Most objections, that are actually issued against the Last Supper being a Passover *seder*, are not delivered from the substance of what occurred at the meal, but instead around the verses which introduce the scene for us. The Synoptics depict the Last Supper being a *seder* meal, and the Fourth Gospel depicts it as occurring before the Passover. The chart below lays out what Mark, Matthew, and Luke state, comparing it to John:

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WAS THE LAST SUPPER A SEDER MEAL?		
MARK	MATTHEW	LUKE
<p>On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover <i>lamb</i> was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?" And He sent two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him; and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, "The Teacher says, "Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' And he himself will show you a large upper room furnished <i>and</i> ready; prepare for us there." The disciples went out and came to the city, and found <i>it</i> just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover. When it was evening He came with the twelve (Mark 14:12-26).</p>	<p>Now on the first <i>day</i> of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Yeshua and asked, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?" And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, "The Teacher says, "My time is near; I <i>am</i> to keep the Passover at your house with My disciples."'" The disciples did as Yeshua had directed them; and they prepared the Passover (Matthew 26:17-19).</p>	<p>Then came the <i>first</i> day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover <i>lamb</i> had to be sacrificed. And Yeshua sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, so that we may eat it." They said to Him, "Where do You want us to prepare it?" And He said to them, "When you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house that he enters. And you shall say to the owner of the house, "The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"' And he will show you a large, furnished upper room; prepare it there." And they left and found <i>everything</i> just as He had told them; and they prepared the Passover. When the hour had come, He reclined <i>at the table</i>, and the apostles with Him. And He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:7-15).</p>
THE DAY OF PREPARATION		
JOHN		
<p>Now before the Feast of the Passover, Yeshua knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, <i>the son</i> of Simon, to betray Him, <i>Yeshua</i>, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself (John 13:1-4).</p>		

The difference present, between the three Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel, is that the Synoptics state that the room was readied for Yeshua and His Disciples to eat the Passover (Mark 14:12, 14; Matthew 26:17-18; Luke

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22:8,11), and John states that the meal was held before Passover (John 13:1) with the Lord crucified on "the day of preparation for the Passover" (John 19:14). There are those who believe that the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel are in contradiction, and that we have to choose either one or the other. This would make one testimony in Scripture right, and one testimony in Scripture inaccurate, or just flat wrong. This obviously does not sit well with all interpreters—myself included—who believe that there is probably a fair way to synthesize the two perspectives.

One of the most common proposals for the Last Supper being held as a Passover *seder*, but with Yeshua's execution following taking place on the Day of Preparation for the Passover, is that there were competing religious calendars in usage in Judea. The Synoptic Gospels might represent the calendar of the sectarian Qumran community, which determined that the 14th of Nisan must always occur from Tuesday to Wednesday, this being an unofficial calendar that could have been followed by Yeshua and His followers. Then, following the more official and mainline calendar reckonings of the Temple authorities, Yeshua could have been sacrificed on the Day of Preparation of the Passover, as recorded in the Fourth Gospel.<sup>27</sup>

Another solution offered is that Yeshua and His Disciples held an actual *seder* meal on the 14th of Nisan, with the rest of the normal Jewish population. Yeshua being crucified on the Day of Preparation, is not the time immediately preceding the actual start of the Passover, but instead is "the day of Preparation of Passover Week" (John 19:14, NIV) for the weekly Sabbath that took place during Passover week (as proposed by at least one evangelical scholar in D.A. Carson in his commentary on John).<sup>28</sup> Yeshua would actually not have been sacrificed in conjunction with the Passover lambs, but instead with the offering at Unleavened Bread (Numbers 18:18-22). Yeshua would still be sacrificed as "the Passover" (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7), although in a more general sense as a *chagigah* (חגיגה) or festal offering.<sup>29</sup> From this perspective, Yeshua's *seder* meal was held on Thursday night, He was sacrificed on Friday before the weekly *Shabbat*, and then was resurrected Sunday morning—the traditional Good Friday-Easter Sunday scenario. Some Messianic ministries have adopted this perspective (discussed further).

Some are not convinced that the Day of Preparation is indicative of just the weekly Sabbath, but think that it can be used of High Sabbaths for Torah festivals as well, such as the first day of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:7).

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. R.N. Longenecker, "Preparation, Day of," in *ISBE*, 3:953.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. W.E. Nunnally, "Preparation, Day of," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp 1080-1081.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 315.

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John 19:14 does employ *paraskeuē tou Pascha* (παρασκευὴ τοῦ πάσχα), which is most literally “the preparation of the passover” (YLT). John 19:31 makes the point of how “the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away.” The Day of Preparation on which Yeshua was crucified, according to this, took place before the High Sabbath of Passover. Certainly a High Sabbath could occur on the seventh day or a normal Saturday Sabbath, but not always. *LS* notably does define *paraskeuē* (παρασκευή) with the general definition, “among the Jews, *the day of Preparation*, the day before the sabbath of the Passover,”<sup>30</sup> which gives us room to think that the Day of Preparation was before a High Sabbath separate from the weekly Sabbath.

Consider how some of Yeshua’s adversaries among the chief priests and Pharisees actually met with Pontius Pilate “on the next day, the day after the preparation” (Matthew 27:62). If the Day of Preparation were simply the time to prepare for the normal, weekly *Shabbat*, then why does Matthew 27:62 not just say that the chief priests and Pharisees met with Pilate on the Sabbath? Obviously they are in conspiracy to keep the Disciples from stealing Yeshua’s body (Matthew 27:64)—and their sinister mission has caused them to overlook any kind of Torah keeping, be it on the weekly Sabbath or a separate High Sabbath.<sup>31</sup> But seeing how Matthew has referred to this as after the Day of Preparation, we should probably not view this as being a Saturday.

R.N. Longenecker adds to our discussion how the Passover, as a fixed day on the Hebrew calendar, “often coincided with the normal sabbath of the seventh day,” further adding, “while Friday is the usual day of Preparation for the normal weekly sabbath, the precise dating of the preparation for the Passover sabbath mentioned in the Gospels depends on the dating of the Passover for that year” (*ISBE*).<sup>32</sup> It could very well be that the Day of Preparation occurred earlier than right before the normal weekly Sabbath, but still obviously affected the weekly Sabbath. If Yeshua’s execution took place on a Thursday, and not the traditional Friday, then the Day of Preparation

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<sup>30</sup> *LS*, 602.

<sup>31</sup> Whether the Day of Preparation occurred before a High Sabbath separate from or a normal weekly Sabbath that was also a High Sabbath, John Nolland’s observations remain true:

“Is Matthew quietly saying that...the chief priests and Pharisees here had failed to do the preparing they deemed necessary and here are found doing it on the sabbath, in violation of at least its spirit and probably, in their own best lights, also its letter?” (*New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Matthew* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 1236).

<sup>32</sup> Longenecker, “Preparation, Day of,” in *ISBE*, 3:953.

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would be most especially a stringent time for getting ready—affecting both the High Sabbath and then the normal weekly Sabbath following.<sup>33</sup>

What makes the Messiah's crucifixion occurring on the Day of Preparation, before the actual day of Passover compelling, is how the Fourth Gospel makes a direct connection between Yeshua's death and the Passover lamb with quotations from the Torah (John 19:36; cf. Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12). Yeshua's crucifixion is intended to be directly associated with the killing of the lambs prior to the day of Passover on the 14th of Nisan, and not the festal offering of the 15th of Nisan (although if He were executed on this date, I believe the prophetic typology of the Passover lamb killed would still hold). An execution on the 14th of Nisan, among other things, would mean that when Yeshua died it did not occur during some kind of other offering made in the Temple, but rather the masses who were having their Passover lambs killed—most especially the priests—would have had to have encountered the veil closing off the Holy of Holies torn at His death (Mark 15:38; Matthew 27:51).

So looking at the testimony of the Synoptics, which state that Yeshua held a *seder*, and the testimony of the Fourth Gospel, which states Yeshua was executed on the Day of Preparation—how could the Lord have actually held a Passover for the Last Supper? There is actually a way that we can consider Yeshua to have held a Passover *seder* meal, but then for Him to have been executed on the Day of Preparation following, with the official date of Passover following. Consider this proposal:

1. The historian Josephus records how at one Passover over 250,000 lambs were slaughtered for over 2.7 million people (*Jewish War* 9.424). Even if Josephus' figure is exaggerated, even killing several tens of thousands of lambs would probably have taken more than a full 24 hours. One can easily envision some lambs slaughtered immediately before (and maybe even after) the official start of Passover on the 14th of Nisan. The Mishnah indicates the possibility of a lamb slaughtered on the 13th of Nisan as being acceptable (m.*Zevachim* 1:3),<sup>34</sup> with early slaughter being allowed because of the sheer numbers of lambs.

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<sup>33</sup> This indicates that the usage of "Sabbath" we see (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:42) with the Day of Preparation takes on application not only for the High Sabbath of Unleavened Bread (Friday), but the weekly Sabbath that would follow (Saturday).

<sup>34</sup> "The Passover which one slaughtered on the morning of the fourteenth [of Nisan] not for its own name ['under some other name']—R. Joshua declares valid, as if it were slaughtered on the thirteenth [of Nisan]" (m.*Zevachim* 1:3; Neusner, *Mishnah*, 699).

Also consult the relevant sections of Maurice Casey, "The Date of the Passover Sacrifices and Mark 14:12" in *Tyndale Bulletin* Vol. 48. No. 2 (1997). Accessible online at <<http://www.tyndale.cam.ac.uk/>>.

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2. Yeshua's Disciples found the room for their keeping of the Passover "On the first day of Unleavened Bread<sup>35</sup>" (Mark 14:12), with Matthew's later witness stating, "Now on the first...of Unleavened Bread<sup>36</sup>" (Matthew 26:17), omitting *hēmera* (ἡμέρα) or "day." This is likely indicative of the general start of the Passover season, and how preparations were underway prior to them actually occurring.<sup>37</sup> Claiming that Unleavened Bread started a little earlier than the 15th of Nisan (cf. Leviticus 23:6), is witnessed in Jewish literature (Josephus *Jewish War* 5.99).
3. Yeshua and His Disciples did not employ any kind of sectarian calendar in their keeping of Passover or the appointed times, but would have normally observed Passover on the 14th of Nisan with everyone else. Yet, because of the severity of the moment, and the Messiah's strong desire to celebrate Passover with them (Luke 22:15) knowing He was to be crucified, the Last Supper *seder* meal they all attended was deliberately held a day early.

The thought that Yeshua the Messiah would hold a Passover *seder* meal earlier than most everyone else, on the night of the 13th of Nisan, is a sensible and reasonable solution—even if a bit obvious. The Master and His Disciples, especially considering the many tens of thousands of lambs that were probably being slain more than a day before the 14th of Nisan arrived, could certainly have had an authorized lamb for their Passover meal. The reason that Yeshua would have held this Passover early, would have been because "My time is near; I *am to* keep the Passover" (Matthew 26:18).

The suggestion that the Messiah would have deliberately held His Last Supper *seder* meal early, is notably one that is not popular with some of today's Messianics—especially those who hold to some rigid and inflexible applications of the Torah. A common value judgment made is that Yeshua would never have held His *seder* earlier, because that would be seen as nullifying or abolishing the Torah's instruction. In his lengthy paper "The Chronology of the Crucifixion," Tim Hegg just dismisses the thought that Yeshua's *seder* meal could have been held a day earlier, commenting,

"[S]ome would contend that Yeshua, as the Messiah, has the authority to change the timing of the Pesach meal and to hold it a day earlier. That, of

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<sup>35</sup> Grk. *τῆ πρώτῃ ἡμέρᾳ τῶν ἄζύμων*.

<sup>36</sup> Grk. *Τῆ...πρώτῃ τῶν ἄζύμων*.

<sup>37</sup> Wise concurs how in Mark 14:12, "Mark is not using technical terminology here. In the more popular understanding this technical distinction was lost," suggesting how "Mark, in his description, has done what individuals today do when they speak of celebrating Christmas on Christmas Eve" ("Last Supper," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 445).

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course, is based upon the *mistaken* notion that Yeshua disregarded or otherwise considered the Torah to be obsolete in light of His having brought the Kingdom."<sup>38</sup>

These statements are a Messianic overreaction to some negative Christian views about the Torah, so that when special circumstances require there to be some flexibility in application, it is then incorrectly concluded that the Torah is invalidated. If we are a bit more reasonable about this, if Yeshua's *seder* meal were held a day early, then certainly the One who was Lord of the Sabbath<sup>39</sup> can surely also be allowed to be the Lord of the Passover. Yeshua was certainly doing the right thing making sure that His Disciples had a *seder* experience before His death—as He was the grand fulfillment in His very self of what the original Passover and Exodus represented.

I find no significant problems with the suggestion that Yeshua's Passover *seder* **on the year of His crucifixion** was held a little early—as it would enable Him to be killed on the actual day of lambs being offered, the 14th of Nisan, the Day of Preparation for the Passover. R.T. France's thoughts are appreciated:

"This particular group [Yeshua and the Disciples] would not differ outwardly from many other groups of pilgrims who had made arrangements to eat the meal together in Jerusalem at that time, except for one striking difference: according to the chronology for which I shall argue...they held it one day before the official date. Set within the Passover festival season, it was deliberately planned by Jesus as a Passover meal, but he knew that when the official time came the following evening, he would no longer be there to share it with them, and so he held it a day in advance. This in itself would give a special poignancy to the occasion, and what Jesus said once the meal began would lift it far out of the ordinary run of Passover celebrations."<sup>40</sup>

The need for Yeshua as a Rabbi to hold a Passover *seder* with His Disciples, even if it might have been a little early, is quite apparent. Originally in Exodus, the Passover was to be a family affair, and at times could also include one's neighbors (Exodus 12:3-4). Yeshua and His Twelve Disciples did compose, in a matter of speaking, a kind of extended family (cf. Matthew 12:46-50)—and they did make the journey to be in Jerusalem for Passover.

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<sup>38</sup> Tim Hegg (2009). *The Chronology of the Crucifixion: A Comparison of the Gospel Accounts*. Torah Resource. Retrieved 22 January, 2010, from <<http://www.torahresource.com>>.

<sup>39</sup> Matthew 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 6:5.

<sup>40</sup> R.T. France, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), pp 980-981.

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The testimony we see from the Synoptic Gospels and Fourth Gospel is not just a normal *seder* meal being held, but one where there are some significant teachings issued to those who would be carrying on the Messiah's work. If the meal were held on the evening of the 13th of Nisan, prior to the actual Passover on the 14th, it was for the unique needs of the moment—and by no means has to be considered any kind of abolishment of the Torah. As France recognizes,

"Of course it was strictly incorrect to hold a 'Passover' at any time other than the evening of Nisan 14/15, but Jesus was not one to be bound to formal regulations in an emergency situation!"<sup>41</sup>

I believe that the easiest way to reconcile the surface differences between the Synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel is to recognize that Yeshua's Last Supper meal was a Passover *seder* held a day earlier than everyone else's. **This is because on the actual day of Passover, Yeshua knew He would be dead.** The special circumstances present at this Passover season required a special accommodation. Yeshua wanted to be sure that before the actual Passover started, that His Disciples were given some critical teachings by Him, with all of the elements of the *seder* before them. It would be a scene that would be etched permanently in their minds, as they would have to take it with them for the rest of their lives—long after He was gone.<sup>42</sup>

The Last Supper as a Passover *seder* is something that is also to be permanently etched into our minds. Whether we consider His *seder* to have been held on the 14th of Nisan with the rest of the Jewish community in Jerusalem, or a little earlier on the 13th of Nisan with just the Twelve, **what is most important is that we pay attention to what He told His Disciples.** Do we really understand that as a result of His sacrificial work for us following, that the realization of great peace can be enacted with us? As our Lord said, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful" (John 14:27).

If we have the *shalom* of Yeshua present in our hearts, then we should be able to manifest it in our behavior to one another as sinners saved by His grace. Even though some useful theological discussions might take place over the details of the Last Supper meal, these discussions must occur in a manner that brings glory and honor to the One who conducted it. They must occur so

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<sup>41</sup> R.T. France, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 365.

<sup>42</sup> While I do not share all of his conclusions, this section has taken into account some of the useful thoughts and references offered by Derek Leman of Messianic Jewish Musings <<http://derek4messiah.wordpress.com>>, in a series of postings offered from 09-11 March, 2009.

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that the joy we are to be experiencing in Him during this time might be filled and enhanced (John 15:11), not taken away.

Furthermore, if Yeshua did actually hold His *seder* meal a day early on the 13th of Nisan, He was not establishing a firm precedent for the later years following that of His death. Messianic Believers today should commemorate the Passover *seder* on the 14th of Nisan as specified in the Torah, along with the worldwide Jewish community, recognizing the uniqueness of that one year in which the Lord was crucified.

### The Bread and the Cup

What many Christians take away from the Last Supper is the understanding of Yeshua directing the Disciples' attention to the elements of bread and wine, and then connecting them to His forthcoming sacrifice. Yeshua directs His true followers to somehow eat of His flesh and drink of His blood in order to be reckoned as His:

"So Yeshua said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink'" (John 6:53-55).

Originally spoken to a Jewish audience, these kinds of words could be viewed as being quite scandalous. The Torah forbids one from drinking blood and eating live flesh (Genesis 9:4; Leviticus 7:26; et. al.). Here, in teaching an audience that needs to be focused on who He is as the Messiah, Yeshua's words are stated so that they understand the degree to which they need to be considering Him. Literally speaking, people are not to either drink the Lord's blood or eat His flesh. Representatively speaking, people are supposed to meditate on how Yeshua's blood and His body are the tools by which full redemption is secured.

In the diverse traditions of Christianity today, many remember the scene of the Last Supper via the practice of communion: some kind of wine or grape juice, and some kind of bread, are consumed to remember the Lord's death. In the evangelical Methodist tradition in which I was raised, our church held communion on the first Sunday of every month. It was an open communion, meaning that everyone at the service could partake (and not just members of the United Methodist Church). It used grape juice and leavened bread. People most often took communion via intinction, meaning they would take a piece of the bread, and dip it in the cup of grape juice. When I would take communion, because my parents were active lay leaders and my father would teach on the Passover every year during Holy Week, I knew some rudimentary connections between it and the Passover. So important was communion to my family, that communion was actually offered at my father's funeral service.

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The other main Christian tradition I have witnessed has been the administration of the Eucharist in the Anglican Church, as I have relatives who are evangelical Episcopalians. When I visit them, I will typically go to services with them on Sunday morning, where communion is offered at the close of every service. It is an open table for all Christians as well. There is more liturgy involved in the Anglican communion, than in the Wesleyan tradition (even though the Wesleyan movement arose from the Church of England). The elements do take on much more of a veneer of Catholicism, even though a kind of unleavened wafer, and real wine is used (in their church's case, a Port wine that has been diluted with water)—closer to what was actually served at the original Last Supper. And even though the Anglican communion is quite separated from any kind of First Century *seder*, the liturgy as employed from the Book of Common Prayer does include a quote from 1 Corinthians 5:7-8: "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us; *Therefore let us keep the feast.*"<sup>43</sup>

These are two Protestant traditions<sup>44</sup> which try to honor the Last Supper, and how the Lord Yeshua really did shed His blood and was brutally beaten for the atonement of sins. Within the Gospels, there is no doubting how there is a special point in the meal Yeshua conducts, when He makes mention of a specific cup and some specific bread—which His Disciples are to take to serious heart:

"While they were eating, He took *some* bread, and after a blessing He broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, and said, 'Take *it*; this is My body.' And when He had taken a cup *and* given thanks, He gave *it* to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, 'This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I say to you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God'" (Mark 14:22-25).

"While they were eating, Yeshua took *some* bread, and after a blessing, He broke *it* and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.' After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (Matthew 26:26-30).

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<sup>43</sup> *The Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 364.

<sup>44</sup> Even though the Anglican Church does include many of the outward elements of Catholicism, the theology of the Church of England and its American Episcopalian counterpart is largely Protestant.

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"And when He had taken a cup *and* given thanks, He said, 'Take this and share it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes.' And when He had taken *some* bread *and* given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' And in the same way *He took* the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood'" (Luke 22:17-20).

When most of today's average Christians read what Yeshua did at the Last Supper, they rightfully acknowledge how the cup of wine and the bread that are served are to remind them of how His sacrifice has brought them redemption. The beauty of today's Messianic movement is that it emphasizes these things not as just common elements of any meal, but the main elements of the Passover *seder*. Messianic teachers rightly recognize that the bread Yeshua lifts up is likely that of the *afikoman*, and the cup would be the third cup of the traditional *seder*, the Cup of Redemption.<sup>45</sup>

At this point in the Last Supper, Yeshua has deliberately interrupted some of the normal liturgy and questions (cf. Exodus 12:26-27), to identify the elements of the *seder* with that of His own salvific work. The *lechem oni* (עֵי לֶחֶם אֲפִיקוֹמָן) or "bread of affliction" (Deuteronomy 16:3), for example, now becomes associated with the soon to come breaking of His own body. Luke's testimony is most specific in the claim that Yeshua's sacrificial activity will be responsible for inaugurating the era of the New Covenant—prophesied in the Tanach as offering complete forgiveness for God's people, and the supernatural transcription of His commandments on the heart (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27).

By the early Second Century, the emerging Christian Church would largely limit remembrance of the Last Supper by only employing the elements of wine and bread, in the Eucharist.<sup>46</sup> Some see hints in the Apostolic Scriptures themselves that remembering the cup and the bread *independent* of the Passover *seder* took on some focus for the *ekklēsia*. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26,

"For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Yeshua in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same way *He took* the cup also after

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1992), 80.

<sup>46</sup> The term "Eucharist" is derived from the Greek *eucharistos* (εὐχαρίστος), simply meaning "being grateful, *thankful*" (*BDAG*, 416).

Cf. "Eucharist," in Bercot, pp 251-252.

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supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."

No Biblical reader or commentator can deny how the cup which the Lord lifted up and the bread which He broke at the Last Supper—would have a definite impact on later generations of His followers, and how this was largely positive. The good Apostle Paul used the Last Supper to focus the spiritual attention of the Corinthians. When faithful Christians today partake of communion, their attention is also focused on the sacrifice of Yeshua for their sins. But was Paul actually reflecting on the tradition of the Eucharist—a religious rite designed to focus on the wine and bread consumed at the Last Supper—offered to Believers throughout the year, sometimes in religious services held daily? Or, is this to be something remembered at a very solemn and sacred moment in Believers' remembrance of the Passover *seder*?

How are we to view Paul's assertion "every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26, NEB)? Obviously, this is not a once-in-a-lifetime affair, as the cup and bread the Messiah employed at His Last Supper are to be remembered on some kind of regular basis. I am most inclined to think that the cup and bread that Believers are to partake of are those which Yeshua employed at His Passover *seder*, possessing significance far beyond what they originally entailed for those only remembering the Exodus. The Corinthians were notably those who were to celebrate the festival of Passover remembering Yeshua's sacrifice (1 Corinthians 5:7-8), and so the cup they would drink and unleavened bread they would eat, should be understood in this context. Anthony C. Thiselton's comments on 1 Corinthians 11:26 are quite poignant:

"...Paul...likens what the assembled congregation does in the actions of eating and drinking the bread and wine that makes believers contemporary with the cross *to the recital of the Passover Haggadah as gospel proclamation*. However, this is not simply a publishing of the objective event of the cross. It includes this (**the bread is broken and the cup . . . in the same way . . .**). Yet like those who recite the Haggadah of the Passover on the understanding that '*in every generation a man must so regard himself as he came forth himself out of Egypt*' (*m.Pesachim* 10:5), it *also witnesses to the participant's self-involving appropriation of the cross both for redemption and lifestyle as those who share Christ's death in order to share Christ's life.*"<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 887.

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Here, Thiselton astutely identifies Yeshua's words about the cup and the bread specifically focused upon at the Last Supper—as being closely associated with the kind of liturgy employed within the Passover *seder*. Those who have personally identified with the meaning of the Exodus, are to now also personally identify with the meaning of the Messiah's death. When today's Messianic Believers arrive at that special point in the Passover meal—the eating of the *afikoman* and drinking of the third cup—is our Lord's redemptive work and teaching at the Last Supper at all remembered? Is there a solemn, silent moment, in either our home or congregational *seder* meals, when the redemption which He has accomplished is seriously reflected upon?

The Messianic movement has certainly inherited a Christian theological tradition for which communion on either a weekly or monthly basis is very important. Many churches today, wanting to more closely place communion within the context of Passover, actually use Jewish *matzah*. There is no uniform practice among Messianic congregations regarding communion. Some take Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:26 as being a normative practice for every worship service. Others take it as a reference to the yearly *seder* meal. Still, others will offer a kind of communion during various Messianic prayer services. And should they do this, *matzah* is rightly employed.

I come from a Christian background where communion was very important to the spiritual well being of the Church. Having been Messianic now for over fifteen years—while I greatly appreciate the Passover *seder* and the enrichment I have experienced in my faith—too frequently the eating of the *afikoman* and drinking of the Cup of Redemption, has not often been as spiritually enlightening as communion was in either my Wesleyan upbringing, or even when I partake of it now with my Episcopalian relatives. But I do not think this has anything to do with how the *afikoman* and Cup of Redemption are to focus our observance of Passover, nor how they are only considered once a year. I think it has to do with a failure on the part of many to consider the severity of this moment in the *seder*, and a lack of emphasis from the *seder's* leader(s). Paul's words continue, telling us,

“Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly” (1 Corinthians 11:27-29).

In the course of a home or congregational *seder*, there can be the tendency for people to get caught up in the eating of the meal, or the conversation of the guests, or in drinking a little too much wine—so that when the most important part of the evening arrives, **we may have lost our attention**. So if today's Messianics choose not to have a kind of weekly or annual communion, like their Christian counterparts—and I myself am

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inclined to only remember the Lord's Supper once a year at Passover—we have to make sure that we are doing it in a very reverent way. While we do not at all have to think that the bread and wine become the literal body and blood of the Lord, as the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation advocates—the Lutheran doctrine of consubstantiation, of the Lord's actual presence being there with the elements, might be something worthy of consideration. We do have to think that the Messiah Yeshua is sitting there with us during our *seder*, watching our every moves, and listening to our conversation (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:30-32).<sup>48</sup>

### Yeshua's Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane

While much of our attention as Messianic Believers is rightly focused on the Last Supper meal, and connections seen with the elements of the Passover *seder*—there is much more that has to be considered within the scope of Yeshua serving as a Passover sacrifice. Once the Last Supper concluded and the Disciples completed reciting Hallel (Psalms 115-118), things then began to take serious shape. They all depart for the Garden of Gethsemane, where we see some of the agony Yeshua has to experience, as He knows that He is about to be arrested and later unjustly executed.

The three Synoptics all record the scene that takes place in Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42; Matthew 26:36-46; Luke 22:39-46), with the Fourth Gospel only telling us that Yeshua and His Disciples crossed over the Kidron ravine (John 18:1). The main point is that once their *seder* meal is concluded, the party all moves over to a place adjacent to the Mount of Olives. Luke's testimony is that this was "His custom" (Luke 22:39), which might be a good indication that in previous Passover commemorations, or other important gatherings, the Disciples had gone to this Garden of Gethsemane before (John 18:2). Then again, it may simply be an indication that after an important teaching gathering, it was Yeshua's custom for them all to go to a quiet place to reflect and pray. This is, after all, what they were supposed to be doing with the time of His death soon at hand.

Prior to leaving the place where they remembered the Passover, Yeshua makes a reference to Zechariah 13:7, which emphasizes "Strike the Shepherd that the sheep may be scattered" (cf. Mark 14:27; Matthew 26:31). At the death of the Messiah, His followers are likely going to react differently. Yeshua told Peter how he will deny Him, although Peter strongly protests to this, as do the other Disciples (Mark 14:29-31; Matthew 26:35). The Lord also makes the clear point to tell them, "But after I have been raised, I will go ahead of you to Galilee" (Matthew 26:32). While Yeshua has told them He will

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<sup>48</sup> Consult the FAQ, "Communion" (reproduced in this publication's section on "FAQs on the Spring Holiday Season").

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die, He also has told them He will be resurrected—and affirms to His Disciples how they will be reunited. But seeing this in the Gospels, the natural question we can ask is whether they really believed it before it took place.

Mark and Matthew both record the main substance of what transpired when Yeshua and the Disciples arrive at the Garden of Gethsemane. Yeshua tells His Disciples "Sit here while I go over there and pray" (Matthew 26:36; cf. Mark 14:32). Peter, James, and John all go with Him off to the side, and the Lord "began to be very distressed and troubled" (Mark 14:33; cf. Matthew 26:37). The agony Yeshua experiences is described as being to the point of death, and so He simply asks His three closest Disciples to be near Him (Mark 14:34; Matthew 26:38). One can think that Yeshua had a very high pulse, and was overwhelmed with anxiety—realizing that He was preparing to not just die and be humiliated like a common criminal—but **actually carry all of the sins of all humanity past, present, and future on His person**. Yeshua then goes off just by Himself, praying to the Father, "if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39; cf. Mark 14:36). Yeshua's reference to the cup He has to bear is no doubt connected to the imagery of the Passover dinner He and the Disciples have just concluded, and how He held up the cup representing the blood He would have to shed. Still, Yeshua's faithfulness unto death, in obedience to His Father, is realized.

Yeshua continues to pray (Mark 14:39), realizing He has to continue with the Father's will. But when He finishes, the Lord finds His Disciples asleep, something He is quite displeased about as they have only been there for about an hour (Mark 14:36-37; cf. Matthew 26:40-41). Yeshua returns to His praying, and still finds the Disciples asleep later, and they do not know what to do (Mark 14:38-39; Matthew 26:42-43). This repeats itself a third and final time, when all Yeshua can tell them is, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Behold, the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going; behold, the one who betrays Me is at hand!" (Matthew 26:45-46; cf. Mark 14:41-42). Yeshua was very concerned that in a drowsy state, His Disciples would fall into temptation, asserting how "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mark 14:38; Matthew 26:41). Some very important things were about to take place, and they would never again be able to be this close to their Rabbi until after His resurrection.

Luke's record adds some more specific details to the scene of what takes place in the Garden of Gethsemane. When Yeshua goes off to pray, He only "withdrew from them about a stone's throw" away (Luke 22:41), far enough away for some privacy, but probably not far enough to not be noticed or heard in some way. While praying, an angel appears before Yeshua to comfort Him with what He is about to endure (Luke 22:42-43). The most significant point that Luke makes is a physiological diagnosis of what Yeshua goes through: "And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became

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like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground” (Luke 22:44). We should not think that Yeshua actually sweat blood, but what He did sweat would certainly have been a rather thick, very odorous perspiration, and quite indicative of one with a fast pulse and probably high blood pressure—even on the verge of a heart attack. Luke also observes that the Disciples were sleeping out of some kind of sorrow (Luke 22:45-46).

The prayer Yeshua offers to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane is different than what is commonly called the High Priestly Prayer, offered at the end of the Last Supper in John 17. While John 17 is offered up on behalf of His Disciples, the agonizing prayer Yeshua issues here is on behalf of Himself. *He does not know if He can fully go through with it.* Within theological studies for many centuries, the prayer Yeshua delivers about not quite being able to bear “the cup” has caused some controversies. If Yeshua is God Incarnate, should He not be able to simply experience all of this, and not worry about it? Why demonstrate any kind of dread about having to be humiliated? The scene of the Garden of Gethsemane is a strident example of the humanity of Yeshua, His participation in the human experience, and how God entered the world of mortals as a mortal with the express purpose of redeeming mortals. Yeshua’s prayer to the Father was a fully human response to what He was about to endure, one which He willingly went through, not at all asserting or claiming His privileges as God. As the *Carmen Christi* hymn affirms:

“[T]hough he was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited<sup>49</sup>, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8, NRSV).<sup>50</sup>

While Yeshua was praying, His Disciples—even the three closest to Him—were off tired and asleep. We do not know if they had too much to eat

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<sup>49</sup> Grk. *harpagmos* (ἄρπαγμός); “**someh. to which one can claim or assert title by gripping or grasping**” (Frederick William Danker, ed., et. al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, third edition [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 133).

Also, “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage” (TNIV).

<sup>50</sup> The *Carmen Christi* hymn continues, though, affirming the exaltation of Yeshua in Heaven as LORD, and how all of Creation will worship Him (Philippians 2:9-11; cf. Isaiah 45:23). In total, Philippians 2:5-11 demonstrates how Yeshua is both God and man, an early affirmation made by the First Century *ekklēsia* to be sure—but most importantly how His act of supreme sacrifice is to motivate His followers in proper service to one another.

For a further discussion, consult the commentary *Philippians for the Practical Messianic* by J.K. McKee. Also consult the excellent thoughts of Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians*, Vol. 43 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 78.

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or drink during the *seder* meal, and were now drowsy as a result. What we can deduce, especially from Yeshua's warning about them not falling into temptation (Mark 14:38; Matthew 26:41; Luke 22:40), is that demonic spiritual forces were out there having a negative affect on the Disciples. If they were not careful, it would impair their judgment in the events that would soon follow. The Mishnah actually includes some Passover instructions about falling asleep that could have a parallel with the Messiah's warning:

"And after the Passover meal they do not conclude with dainties. [If] some of those present fell asleep, they may eat [again]. But if all [fell asleep], they may not eat again. R. Yose says, '[If they merely] droused, they may eat again. But if they fell into a deep sleep, they may not eat again'" (m.*Pesachim* 10:8).<sup>51</sup>

There is no real indication that the Disciples fell into a deep sleep while Yeshua was praying. After consuming a *seder* meal with wine, having walked all the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, and with it being late and relatively dark—they all took little naps. There was *obviously* no after dinner coffee available, nor any other caffeine drink to keep them awake and at least artificially stirred for a little while. The warning we see in the Jewish tradition of Passover about not falling into a deep sleep should be well taken. Yeshua wanted the Disciples to be fully awake and alert, as His betrayal by Judas prepares to commence. It will be insufficient for His students to remember their Last Seder together, but then completely forget the events that follow. *The same is true for us as well.*

### Yeshua's Betrayal by Judas Iscariot

One character whose actions feature prominently in the account of Yeshua's forthcoming execution is Judas Iscariot.<sup>52</sup> He has the unfortunate place in Scripture as being known as the one who betrayed Yeshua.<sup>53</sup> The Gospels tell us that Judas was controlled by Satan (Luke 22:3; John 13:2). The Lord Himself said of Judas, "It would have been good for that man if he had not been born" (Matthew 26:24; cf. Mark 14:21)—clearly not the greatest of epitaphs. During the Last Supper, Yeshua's announcement that He is to be betrayed comes as a total shock to those in attendance (Mark 14:18-21; Matthew 26:21-23; Luke 22:21-23).

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<sup>51</sup> Neusner, *Mishnah*, 251.

<sup>52</sup> Grk. *Ioudas ho Iskariōtēs* (Ἰούδας ὁ Ἰσκαριώτης).

It is sometimes thought that the surname Iscariot is derivative of him being from Keriot, reflected in the Salkinson-Ginsburg Hebrew New Testament as *Yehudah ish-Q'riot* (יהודה איש קריות), followed by the CJB with "Y'hudah from K'riot." Another thought is that "Iscariot could be derived either from *šqr*, 'lie,' 'liar,' or *sicarius*, 'dagger bearer'" (G.W. Buchanan, "Judas Iscariot," in *ISBE*, 3:1151).

<sup>53</sup> Mark 3:19; Matthew 10:4; 26:25; 27:3; Luke 6:16; John 6:71; 12:4; 13:2; 18:2, 5.

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Judas Iscariot betrayed Yeshua for money, as the priests wanted Him dead (Mark 14:10-11; Matthew 26:14-16; Luke 22:2-5), with their payment of thirty pieces of silver sometimes connected to Zechariah 11:12.<sup>54</sup> Judas being paid to betray his Rabbi could be the result of him having been the treasurer for Yeshua and His band of Disciples (John 12:4-6; 13:29), although this is not conclusive because one who handled money needed to be impeccably responsible and trustworthy.

As Yeshua and His Disciples finish their discussions in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas leads a group with swords and clubs up to Him, sent by the high priests and elders (Mark 14:43; Matthew 26:47; Luke 22:47a), specified to actually be a Roman cohort (John 18:3). Judas had informed the contingent that Yeshua would be the One whom he would kiss, mockingly calling Him "Rabbi" (Mark 14:44-45; Matthew 26:48-49; Luke 22:47-48a). Matthew's testimony records how the Lord told him, "Friend, *do* what you have come for" (Matthew 26:50a), Luke's testimony has the Lord asking Judas the question, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48b), and John's record is the most dynamic of them all, as Yeshua has known all the time what was going to happen:

"So Yeshua, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, 'Whom do you seek?' They answered Him, 'Yeshua the Nazarene.' He said to them, 'I am *He*.' And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. So when He said to them, 'I am *He*,' they drew back and fell to the ground. Therefore He again asked them, 'Whom do you seek?' And they said, 'Yeshua the Nazarene.' Yeshua answered, 'I told you that I am *He*; so if you seek Me, let these go their way,' to fulfill the word which He spoke, 'Of those whom You have given Me I lost not one'" (John 18:4-9).

Of notable interest is how the Fourth Gospel specifies Yeshua saying *egō eimi* (ἐγώ εἰμι), the Septuagint rendering for the Hebrew *ehyeh asher ehyeh* (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה) or "I AM WHO I AM," as first heard from the burning bush to Moses with God describing Himself (Exodus 3:14). Yeshua did not simply say "I am *He*," but "I AM" (John 18:5, 6, 8). At the declaration of Him being the "I AM," some supernatural power is manifested as the mob preparing to seize Him falls back (John 18:6). While Yeshua knows that He has an important destiny to fulfill, and He does not assert or claim His God privileges (cf. Philippians 2:6), His declaration as "I AM" nevertheless serves notice to those present that something greater than themselves is afoot.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> "I said to them, 'If it is good in your sight, give *me* my wages; but if not, never mind!' So they weighed out thirty *shekels* of silver as my wages" (Zechariah 11:12).

<sup>55</sup> For a further discussion, consult G.M. Burge, "I Am' Sayings," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pp 354-356.

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Yeshua is seized by the band of soldiers (Mark 14:46; Matthew 26:50b), but then one of His Disciples takes some rash action by drawing a sword, and severs the ear of the high priest's slave (Mark 14:47; Matthew 26:51; Luke 22:49-50), Malchus (John 18:10). It is, in fact, Peter who commits this act (John 18:10). If Yeshua is to be arrested and later tried, then His Disciples committing these violent deeds will certainly not help His testimony—and their attempts to try to defend Him are quite foolish considering He has angels at His command (Matthew 26:53). So Yeshua actually heals the poor slave's ear right there (Luke 22:51). Yeshua inquires of His captors why they had not tried to seize Him before, as He has been in the Temple complex many times where they could have done it in the daylight (Mark 14:48-49a; Matthew 26:55; Luke 22:52-53). Yeshua is direct in telling them, "While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours" (Luke 22:53). Yeshua intends to fulfill the Scriptures by His being captured (Mark 14:49b; Matthew 26:56), as He asks Peter, "the cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11). And after being seized, "Then all the disciples left Him and fled" (Matthew 26:56b).

The next day, for some reason or another, the Judas who has betrayed his Rabbi comes to his senses (Matthew 27:1-3). It is possible that Judas did not know Yeshua was going to be condemned to death, as opposed to just being indefinitely imprisoned. "[W]hen Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' But they said, 'What is that to us? See *to that* yourself!'" (Matthew 26:3-4). Matthew's record is short in that Judas throws the betrayal money away, and then he hangs himself (Matthew 26:5). This money was apparently used by the priests to purchase a field for the burial of strangers (Matthew 26:6-10).

Luke's record in Acts about the death of Judas Iscariot is sometimes thought to be contradictory to Matthew's. Luke says how, "falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his intestines gushed out" (Acts 1:18). Obviously, whether Judas hanged himself, or he threw himself off a high point, neither record depicts an honorable or pleasant death. Yet there might not be a contradiction at all between either Matthew or Acts. It may very well have been that Judas hanged himself, but that his innards later burst open as his body decomposed. David G. Peterson describes how in Acts 1:18, "There is...a possibility that the Greek expression *prēnēs genomenos* [πρηνής γενόμενος] in v. 18 means 'swelling up' instead of 'falling headlong', in which case we can imagine his corpse becoming bloated in the heat and bursting

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open while still hanging.”<sup>56</sup> Easier still, if the rope Judas used broke as his body decomposed, once hitting the ground his bowels could have ripped open as a result of the heavy fall.

The specific reason, that Judas Iscariot betrayed the Lord Yeshua, is one that will probably elude us for a long time. There are various proposals made, ranging from Judas just being a greedy man, to him being a political Zealot who wanted to overthrow the Romans. When Yeshua clearly did not intend to oust Rome from Judea, Judas might have then turned on Him in revenge.<sup>57</sup> At most, though, this is informed speculation. What the text tells us for certain, beyond any of the personal motives that made Judas a vessel responsible for Yeshua’s death, is that He was controlled by Satan (Luke 22:3; John 13:2). Even those from an Arminian theological framework, who largely emphasize the freewill of human beings, have to concede the likelihood of how Judas Iscariot may very well have been predestined by God to do what he did (Luke 22:22).

## The Trial and Humiliation of Yeshua

The next scene which transpires before Yeshua’s execution can be divided into two main segments: (1) He appears before the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate, and then (2) the Lord is mocked and beaten by Roman soldiers. It is important that we evaluate what took place in the sentencing of Yeshua, and how the Lord did little in terms of defending Himself. As He already acknowledged at His arrest, He could command legions of angels to deliver Him, but the Scriptures had to be fulfilled by Him being sacrificed.

When Yeshua is brought before the Council (Luke 22:66), as witnessed in the Synoptics, we see Peter trailing Him, somehow trying to sit on the outside looking in to what is taking place. The intention of the Sanhedrin was to find a testimony that could be used to execute Yeshua. Even though false witnesses are noted to be brought forward, their testimonies were inconsistent so as to merit anything (Mark 14:53-60; Matthew 26:57-60). A little traction against Yeshua is made with the claim that He would have seen the Temple torn down in three days (Matthew 26:60-61).

The Sanhedrin apparently gets frustrated with witnesses who do not produce what they were probably paid to do, and with questioning that goes nowhere. Yeshua largely stays silent to the fools who have made claims against Him (Matthew 26:62-63a). So the high priest gets direct with Yeshua, asking Him point blank, “Are You the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed *One*?” (Mark 14:61; cf. Matthew 26:63; Luke 22:66-68). The answer of Yeshua to the

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<sup>56</sup> David G. Peterson, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 124.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Buchanan, “Judas Iscariot,” in *ISBE*, 3:1153.

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high priest is also quite direct: "I am; and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN" (Mark 14:62; cf. Matthew 26:64; Luke 22:69). Mark's transcription includes the usage of the theologically significant *egō eimi*, and Mark and Matthew both include quotations from Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13:<sup>58</sup>

"The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet'" (Psalm 110:1).

"I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him" (Daniel 7:13).

These were both significantly loaded pieces of the Tanach from which Yeshua could quote. When the Sanhedrin asks the Lord, "Are You the Son of God, then?" He responds with "Yes, I am" (Luke 22:70), transcribed as *egō eimi*. With Yeshua saying "I AM" He has directly stated that He is a part of the Divine Identity, and is far more than just some agent sent by God. Even with sordid motives involved, and holding to a theology that would largely deny the relevance of the Prophets and Writings, the Saddusaical high priest could still rip his clothes and say to the rest of the Sanhedrin that in considering Himself I AM, Yeshua was guilty of blasphemy (Mark 14:63; Matthew 26:64-65; Luke 22:71). Because they all considered **Yeshua's claim to God status** and application of Tanach passages to Himself to be blasphemy, the Sanhedrin condemned Yeshua to death. Then they blindfold and mock and spit on Him to see whether or not He was truly omnipotent, able to say who did it (Mark 14:64-65; Matthew 26:66-68). Yeshua just endures this humiliation, as this will only be a small part of what is to come.

While Yeshua has been tried and condemned as a blasphemer, Peter is outside waiting, standing near a fire to keep warm. Some of those present recognize who he is as a follower of Yeshua, although He strongly denies it. As Yeshua had told Him earlier during their *seder* meal, when confronted three separate times as to whether He knew Yeshua, Peter denies it before the crowing of the morning rooster (Mark 14:66-72; Matthew 26:69-75; Luke 22:54-65). The Fourth Gospel focuses on how Yeshua was taken before Annas, father-in-law of the high priest, first, before being taken before the Sanhedrin (John 18:13). After being arrested, Peter and another disciple (probably John) follow Yeshua into the court of the high priest (John 18:13-14), with this disciple allowed to go in, but with Peter having to wait outside (John 18:15). Peter is recognized as a Yeshua-follower, but denies it (John 18:16-17), although he continued to wait outside (John 18:18). John's record of what occurred emphasizes how Yeshua asks the high priest to legitimately

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<sup>58</sup> Aland, *GNT*, pp 182, 106.

Luke 22:69 only quotes from Psalm 110:1 (Ibid., pp 299-300).

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bring forth those who have heard His teachings, which have been spoken out in the open, challenging the truthfulness of their claims against Him (John 18:19-23). Yeshua is then taken to Caiaphas (John 18:24) and before the whole Sanhedrin, the scene witnessed in the three Synoptics (cf. Matthew 26:57).

*At this point in the narrative, Judas Iscariot hangs himself (Matthew 27:1-10).*

Because of the Roman occupation of Judea, while the Sanhedrin had the power to condemn various criminals to death—even on the charge of blasphemy—the Sanhedrin lacked the significant power to then go and execute them. This power ultimately rested with the Romans, and so Yeshua's sentence would have to be approved by the governor, Pontius Pilate (Mark 15:1; Luke 23:1). When Yeshua stands before Pilate, the Synoptics record how he asks the Lord, "Are You the King of the Jews?", and Yeshua simply responds with "It is as you say" (Mark 15:2; Matthew 27:11; Luke 22:3). The chief priests are present there to press their case, and Pilate is amazed, witnessing how Yeshua does not answer a single one of their charges (Mark 15:3-5; Matthew 27:12-14). One can certainly think that in Pilate's experience in government he had seen many criminals hurriedly defend themselves. There is a serenity in this *Iēsous* that he had never seen before.<sup>59</sup>

Luke adds that the specific allegation presented before Pilate was, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Messiah, a King" (Luke 23:2). This kind of claim, if proven true, would demonstrate Yeshua to be a revolutionary against Rome. For some reason or another, Pilate concludes before the priests and others gathered, "I find no guilt in this man" (Luke 23:4). Yet the desire on the part of the religious leaders, to see Yeshua executed, is pressing. They insist to Pilate, "He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee even as far as this place" (Luke 23:5). Pilate discovers that Yeshua is actually not from Judea, but instead Galilee, a realm which sits just outside his jurisdiction. So, Pilate has Yeshua sent to meet with Herod, whose jurisdiction did include Galilee, who is in Jerusalem for the Passover (Luke 23:6-7).

One of the most elusive aspects of Yeshua, before the Roman governor, is why Pontius Pilate seems so eager to just let Him go. Given common Roman prejudices against Jews, one would think that Pilate would not really care about another Jew being executed—for blasphemy against some "absurd" Jewish law no less. Did Pilate just send Yeshua off to Herod because he did

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<sup>59</sup> It should go without saying that while the spoken dialogue between Yeshua and those in the Sanhedrin was likely in Hebrew or Aramaic, the spoken dialogue between Yeshua, the priests, and Pontius Pilate was in Greek, as well as the dialogue between Pilate and the crowds demanding Yeshua to be crucified. (Even though the Romans used Latin, Greek was employed as the main language of their eastern Empire.)

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not want to be bothered, and having a strong dislike for the Jewish religious leaders, letting Yeshua go would annoy them? Josephus' works do record some things about Pilate,<sup>60</sup> and the complicated relationship he had with those in Judea. He is known for three major incidents in Judea: (1) sending a garrison into Jerusalem with idolatrous images of the emperor, (2) funding a water project for Jerusalem with seized Temple funds (cf. Luke 13:1), and later (3) suppressing some fanatics in Samaria. As summarized by *ISBE*,

"Josephus portrayed Pilate as a governor who was determined to maintain Roman supremacy and to secure its recognition. Although given to unwise initiatives and quick to act against manifest dissidence, Pilate was ready to investigate and yield to the unfamiliar prejudices of his subjects."<sup>61</sup>

While Pilate seems favorably disposed toward Yeshua at this point in the narrative, as a Roman governor his job was to be a good politician, and maintain Caesar's dominion over Judea. He might have been impressed about Yeshua's composure before His accusers, but it was his responsibility to make sure that Roman interests were served first—and frequently that meant making sure that the people were placated, and not rebellious. Because Pilate could be recalled to Rome if Judea got out of control or riotous, by sending Yeshua to Herod whatever would happen with Him might be able to be pawned off on another official. Luke records how Herod was actually a bit pleased by seeing Yeshua, "for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him" (Luke 23:8). Yeshua does not entertain Herod, and the chief priests and scribes there get their wishes answered. Herod's soldiers mock Yeshua, putting a robe on Him, and He is sent back to Pilate (Luke 23:10-11), because while Yeshua might mainly teach in Galilee, He was arrested in Judea. Herod and Pilate became friends over this, perhaps only because Pilate showed a political gesture of cooperation (Luke 23:12).

With Yeshua as the definite responsibility of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor now has to face the priests and religious leaders who want Yeshua executed (Luke 23:13). He informs them, "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him. No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him" (Luke 23:14-15). Pilate would just assume to punish Him for the inconvenience—perhaps just by a beating—and then let Him go (Luke 23:16).

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<sup>60</sup> *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.35, 55-62, 85-89; *Jewish War* 2.169-177.

Also see Philo *Embassy to Gaius* 299-305.

<sup>61</sup> A.N. Sherwin-White, "Pilate, Pontius," in *ISBE*, 3:868.

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Precedents established during the Roman administration instead required that during the season of Passover, he release a Jewish prisoner held by his garrison (Mark 15:6; Matthew 27:15-16; Luke 23:18). The Jewish man “Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection” (Mark 15:7; cf. Matthew 27:16; Luke 23:19). A crowd was assembled near the governor’s office, and was expecting him to release someone (Mark 15:8). Pilate asks them, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” (Mark 15:9), a description of Yeshua which would cause the chief priests to clearly be irritated (Mark 15:10; Matthew 27:18), in addition to Him simply being referred to as “Messiah” (Matthew 27:17). While Pilate may have wanted to embarrass the Jewish religious leaders, establishing his Roman hegemony, “the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead” (Mark 15:11), and “they cried out all together, saying, ‘Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas!’” (Luke 23:18).

Even if Pontius Pilate recognized that Yeshua the Messiah was really innocent of the claims against Him, the record that we read in the Synoptics should not make us think that Pilate was that distressed over seeing any Jew put to death. *Pilate’s job was to keep Roman order in place.* Pilate is less concerned about Yeshua’s actual innocence, as much as he is concerned about the future—and the kind of reputation Rome will have if his governorship makes a habit of executing proven-to-be-innocent Jews.

As he deliberates what to do with Yeshua, Pilate’s own wife sends him a message: “Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him” (Matthew 27:19). *More than just political forces want Yeshua put away,* but this pagan woman has had a dream that her husband is to stay out of this. But this does not seem to have really affected Pilate. The crowds still have to be stirred by the chief priests and Sanhedrin members for them to demand Barabbas be released (Matthew 27:20-21).

What is to be done if Barabbas is released? The mob demands that Yeshua be crucified, in spite of Pilate not seeing that Yeshua is guilty of death (Mark 15:12-14; Matthew 27:22-23). Luke 23:20-22 records how, “Pilate, wanting to release Yeshua, addressed them again, but they kept on calling out, saying, ‘Crucify, crucify Him!’ And he said to them the third time, ‘Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt *demanding* death; therefore I will punish Him and release Him.’” The mob was getting riotous (Luke 23:23; Matthew 27:24a), and so Pilate himself can claim deniability in the future, “he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, ‘I am innocent of this Man’s blood; see *to that* yourselves’” (Matthew 27:24b). If Pilate’s superiors might want to know in the future why it is claimed that he saw to

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the execution of an innocent Jew, Pilate can say that it was because it was to prevent an uprising.

Matthew's record includes a very significant statement by the crowd: "His blood shall be on us and on our children!" (Matthew 27:25). It is thought sometimes that this is a purposeful remark to portray the Jews as Messiah-killers, who will bear the responsibility for seeing Yeshua unjustly executed for all time. Yet, it is clear that not all Jews in the First Century world are present at the event—many are still out in the Diaspora knowing nothing about Yeshua or events in Judea—and many are readying themselves at various domiciles in Jerusalem to commemorate the Passover, likewise ignorant of what is happening in the city. Those of the crowd, stirred and purposefully agitated by the priests and religious leaders, bear the responsibility. At the very most, as M. Eugene Boring describes, "The people in Matthew's story do not invoke guilt on all future generations, but on themselves and their children—i.e., the generation that experienced the devastation of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple."<sup>62</sup> Still, I am inclined for any kind of Divine retribution for Yeshua's death to only be issued upon those who made up the mob—being manipulated for sure, and some probably even bribed—who failed to understand what they were really demanding. This could also be extended to those who mocked Yeshua as He was dying on the cross later.

Pilate himself bears some of the responsibility for Yeshua's death, giving in to the demands of the mob (Mark 15:15a; Matthew 27:26). Luke 23:24-25 specifies, "Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand be granted. And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Yeshua to their will." At this point, Pilate could have worried that if he did not do something, he could be removed from his position, or at least censured in some way by Rome. (Pilate's later suppression of the Samaritans did merit his having to return to face the Emperor.)

The record is clear, "Wishing to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas for them, and after having Yeshua scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified" (Mark 15:15; cf. Matthew 26:26). Before being led to His execution, though, Yeshua is taken into the Praetorium to be mocked and flogged by the Roman battalion (Mark 15:16; Matthew 26:27). While there is speculation that a Roman flogging alone could have killed Yeshua,<sup>63</sup> what is

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<sup>62</sup> M. Eugene Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," in Leander E. Keck, ed. et. al., *New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 8:487.

<sup>63</sup> The verb *phragelloō* (φραγελλώω), employed in Mark 15:15 and Matthew 27:26, often related to a very serious and painful kind of scourging:

"Slaves, aliens, and criminals condemned to death might be beaten with a whip of knotted cord or leather straps, often weighted with pieces of metal or bone to aggravate the torture...[It]

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recorded in both Mark and Matthew is more concerned with how Yeshua is mocked by the Romans as the so-called “King of the Jews.” Keep in mind, while a Jewish mob has said that they will take responsibility for Yeshua’s death, the Roman soldiers who mock Him certainly do enjoy their handiwork.

The Lord was dressed as a player in a dirty little game, in which these Romans wanted Him to participate. The purple or scarlet robe He was made to wear, was likely some kind of faded, second-hand soldier’s garment, with the crown of thorns they twisted put together from some nearby shrub, probably like acanthus, turned inward so He would bleed (Mark 15:17; Matthew 27:28-29a). The reed Yeshua is given was probably used for military floggings, itself having seen better days (Matthew 27:29b).<sup>64</sup> These Roman soldiers, hearing about the claims made of Yeshua, kneel before Him and mockingly declare “Hail, King of the Jews!” (Mark 15:18; Matthew 27:29c), to a leader who is portrayed as utterly defeated and helpless. Yeshua is spit upon, beaten with the reed that is to depict a fake scepter, and He is sufficiently humiliated by pagans (Mark 15:20; Matthew 27:30). *Certainly, more humiliating acts could have been performed, but there was insufficient time.* When the soldiers finish, the costume is taken off, and Yeshua is led away to be executed (Mark 15:21; Matthew 27:31). Yeshua does not possess enough strength to carry His cross, and so a certain Simon of Cyrene is pressed into service to do it for Him (Mark 15:21; Matthew 27:32; Luke 23:26).

The Messiah’s humiliation by the Romans is something that He Himself said was going to happen: “the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify *Him*” (Matthew 20:18-19; cf. Mark 10:33-34). While there is some responsibility placed upon the Jewish religious leaders for the death of the Messiah, the Romans without question played a very important part in it as well. Pontius Pilate’s claim that Yeshua was “King of the Jews”—when in fact Pilate himself had final authority in Judea—could have been used to assert Roman hegemony by discrediting a traveling rabbi. It was by no means Pilate making a personal recognition of Yeshua’s Messiahship or Divinity. Furthermore, the scene of the Lord’s humiliation, with a faded soldier’s cape, a torturous crown of thorns, and a reed as a scepter that they used to beat Him—**makes the Romans just as directly responsible** as anyone else for the events involving Yeshua’s death.

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was administered upon the naked back, and was at times fatal” (M. Greenberg, “Scourging,” in George Buttrick, ed. et. al., *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols. [Nashville: Abingdon, 1962], 4:245-246).

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Keener, 386.

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The Fourth Gospel interjects many details into what transpired between Yeshua and Pontius Pilate. That Yeshua is tried before the official Passover is clear, as most of the Jewish officials leading Him to meet with Pilate did not enter into the Praetorium so as to possibly be ritually defiled among pagans (John 18:28). Pilate comes out and asks what accusations they have to bring (John 18:29), and is simply told, "If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you" (John 18:30). Pilate says that Yeshua needs to be judged according to Jewish law, but is then informed that He cannot be executed by the Jews (John 18:31). Most likely, this regards how the authority for executing criminals ultimately had to be approved by Rome, although executing someone so close to the Passover and risking defilement could also be a factor.

Pilate himself has to see that the situation with Yeshua is handled. He asks the Lord whether He really is King of the Jews, and we see that Pilate is only acting on the information that he has been given by the Jewish religious leaders (John 18:33-35). Yeshua makes some rather poignant statements to Pilate, telling him "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm" (John 18:36). Yeshua affirms that Pilate's acknowledgement of His kingship is correct, and that He is a teacher of truth (John 18:37). Pilate can see that Yeshua is not someone worthy of death, even if he really does not understand Him and might think His sayings are a bit odd. All Pilate can conclude is "I find no guilt in Him" (John 18:38), but realizing how the Jewish religious leaders want Him executed, he allows the Passover tradition of releasing a prisoner to decide whether Yeshua or Barabbas is released (John 18:39-40).

With Barabbas released, Pilate has Yeshua flogged by his troops (John 19:1-3). Is there a serious contradiction between what we see in the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel—with one set of witnesses having Yeshua flogged and then led to crucifixion, but here with Yeshua flogged and then led before the crowd? Probably not. It was Pilate's hope to not have to execute Yeshua at all, but a thorough beating (Luke 23:15) might be just enough to pacify the growing mob. Looking at the witnesses we have in the four Gospels, Barabbas was probably released at the insistence of the crowd, Pilate announced his intention to condemn Yeshua, the Lord was taken into the Praetorium to be mocked and beaten (John 19:4-5), and with the crowds still there—there was one final chance for Him to not have to be crucified (John 19:4-5).

The scene of a brutally beaten Yeshua does not placate the mob's desire for His life (John 19:6). The Fourth Gospel's witness is clear on why Yeshua was condemned to death: "We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out *to be* the Son of God" (John 19:7). Pilate was even more concerned because of this, and was clear to tell Yeshua that he had

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the authority to release Him or execute Him (John 19:8-10). Yeshua's words are direct to Pilate in how, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has *the* greater sin" (John 19:11). Perhaps this statement was so direct, Pilate could recognize the supernatural nature of it (John 19:12a). But the Jewish mob outside gets the better of him, crying, "If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out *to be* a king opposes Caesar" (John 19:12b). On the Day of Preparation before the Passover, Pontius Pilate sat down and condemned Yeshua to death, for the specific reason of the Jews demanding that their only king be Caesar (John 19:13-15). The Fourth Gospel confirms how Pilate was still ultimately concerned in asserting Roman authority in Judea, and he was looking out for his own political self-interest.

## The Crucifixion and Death of Yeshua

Yeshua the Messiah is taken to be executed at a place called Golgotha, derived from either the Hebrew *Gulgolet* (גִּלְגֹּלֶת) or Aramaic *Gulgulta* (גִּלְגֻּלְתָּא), both meaning Place of a Skull. It is also commonly referred to as Calvary, derived from the Latin Vulgate. When Yeshua is hoisted up to die, He is given a wine beverage that He is unwilling to drink (cf. Psalm 69:21; Proverbs 31:6), while His clothes are divided up by the soldiers by lots (Mark 15:22-24; Matthew 27:33-35; Luke 23:32-33; cf. Psalm 22:18). Luke records how when on His way to the execution site, there was a large number of people, including women, mourning. Yeshua directs their attention not to the present, but to the future when terrible things will happen (Luke 23:27-30; cf. Hosea 10:8). The Lord is executed along with two other criminals (Mark 15:27-28; Matthew 27:38; cf. Isaiah 53:12), and Luke is clear to point out how "Yeshua was saying, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing'" (Luke 23:34). The site of Golgotha was probably a common place outside of Jerusalem where the Romans had executed criminals before, as Yeshua is notably not alone among those executed.

For some reason or another, when terms like "cross" or "crucifixion" are sometimes spoken in a Messianic environment, there can be some negativity witnessed. Much of this is due to Christian anti-Semitic acts performed in the sign of the cross stemming from the Middle Ages. Frequently, an alternative such as hearing that Yeshua died on "the tree," with the Greek *xulon* (ξύλον) also simply meaning "wood," is offered.<sup>65</sup> While it is perfectly legitimate to employ an alternative such as "tree" in one's speech, or also refer to Yeshua being "executed" or "put to death," and not just "crucified"—it is not appropriate to deliberately skew how the Messiah was, in fact, crucified by the

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24.

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Romans. The cross or *stauros* (σταυρός) was certainly not something elaborate or ornate, as might be found in some churches today. It was, rather, an upright pole, onto which a crossbeam carried by the condemned was hoisted into a T shape, forcing one to endure a long and painful suffocation. In spite of some terrible things committed in later history to the Jewish people, with the sign of the cross involved, the events as they transpired in the First Century have to be understood on their own terms.

Enemies of the Roman Empire were often crucified so that they could be made a public example. It was intended to be quite brutal and humiliating, with the dead frequently prohibited burial, instead being left to decompose as carrion.<sup>66</sup> The Roman Senator Cicero would write, "To bind a Roman citizen is a crime; to flog him is an abomination; to slay him is almost an act of murder; to crucify him is—what? There is no fitting word that can possibly describe so horrible a deed."<sup>67</sup> To Jews of the First Century, to be crucified would probably mean that one fell subject to the curse of Deuteronomy 21:22-23.<sup>68</sup> During Titus' siege of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., Josephus records how he gave his soldiers great freedom to crucify: "So the soldiers, out of the wrath and hatred they bore the Jews, nailed those they caught, one after one way, and another after another, to the crosses, by way of jest; when their number was so great, that room was lacking for the crosses, and crosses lacking for the bodies" (*Jewish War* 5.451).<sup>69</sup> He also gives an extra-Biblical testimony to the crucifixion of Yeshua: "Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross" (*Antiquities of the Jews* 18.64).<sup>70</sup> In the estimation of J.B. Green, "the historicity of the death of Jesus on the cross is beyond doubt."<sup>71</sup> In describing how crucifixion was commonly used by Rome for its political prisoners, he points out how "in the province of Judea it proved to be a generally effective weapon against resistance."<sup>72</sup>

Vassilios Tzaferis offers a rather long, but excellent summary, about some of the history, usage, and agony involved with crucifixion:

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<sup>66</sup> Consult J.B. Green, "Death of Jesus: Crucifixion: A Cruel Practice," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, pp 144-148.

<sup>67</sup> Cited in Gordon D. Fee, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 217, fn#13.

<sup>68</sup> "If a man has committed a sin worthy of death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance" (Deuteronomy 21:22-23).

<sup>69</sup> *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, 720.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 480.

<sup>71</sup> Green, "Death of Jesus," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 148.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

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"...Many people erroneously assume that crucifixion was a Roman intention. In fact, Assyrians, Phoenicians and Persians all practiced crucifixion during the first millennium B.C. Crucifixion was introduced in the west from these eastern cultures; it was used only rarely on the Greek mainland, but Greeks in Sicily and southern Italy used it more frequently, probably as a result of their closer contact with Phoenicians and Carthaginians.

"During the Hellenistic period, crucifixion became more popular among the Hellenized population of the east. After Alexander died in 323 B.C., crucifixion was frequently employed both by the Seleucids (the rulers of the Syrian half of Alexander's kingdom) and by the Ptolemies (the rulers of the Egyptian half).

".....

"The traditional method of execution among Jews was stoning. Nevertheless, crucifixion was occasionally employed by Jewish tyrants during that Hasmonean period. Alexander Jannaeus crucified 800 Jews on a single day in 88 B.C.

"At the end of the first century B.C., the Romans employed crucifixion as an official punishment for non-Romans for certain legally limited transgressions. Initially, it was employed not as a method of execution, but only as a punishment. Moreover, only slaves convicted of certain crimes were punished by crucifixion. During this early period, a wooden beam, known as a *furca* or *patibulum* was placed on the slave's neck and bound to his arms. The slave was then required to march through the neighborhood proclaiming his offense. This march was intended as expiation and humiliation. Later, the slave was also stripped and scourged, increasing both the punishment and humiliation. Still later, instead of walking with his arms tied to the wooden beam, the slave was tied to a vertical stake.

"Because the main purpose of this practice was to punish, humiliate and frighten disobedient slaves, the practice did not necessarily result in death. Only in later times, probably in the first century B.C., did crucifixion evolve into a method of execution for those convicted of certain crimes.

"Initially, crucifixion was known as the punishment of slaves. Later, it was used to punish foreign captives, rebels and fugitives, especially during times of war and rebellion. Captured enemies and rebels were crucified *en masse*. Accounts of the suppression of the revolt of Spartacus in 71 B.C. tell how the Roman army lined the road from Capua to Rome with 6,000 crucified rebels and 6,000 crosses. After King Herod's death triggered a minor rebellion in

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Judea in 7 A.D., Quintilius Varus, the Roman Legate of Syria, crucified 2,000 Jews in Jerusalem. During Titus's siege of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., Roman troops crucified as many as 500 Jews a day for several months.

"In times of war and rebellion, when hundreds and even thousands of people were crucified within a short period, little if any attention was paid to the way crucifixion was carried out. Crosses were haphazardly constructed, and executioners were impressed from the ranks of Roman legionaries.

"In peacetime, crucifixions were carried out according to certain rules, by special persons authorized by the Roman courts. Crucifixions took place at specific locations, for example, in particular fields in Rome and on the Golgotha in Jerusalem. Outside of Italy, the Roman procurators alone possessed authority to impose the death penalty. Thus, when a local provincial court prescribed the death penalty, the consent of the Roman procurator had to be obtained to carry out the sentence.

"Once a defendant was found guilty and was condemned to be crucified, the execution was supervised by an official known as the *Carnifex Serarum*. From the tribunal hall, the victim was taken outside, stripped, bound to a column and scourged. The scourging was done with either a stick or a *flagellum*, a Roman instrument with a short handle to which several long, thick thongs had been attached. On the ends of the leather thongs were lead or bone tips. Although the number of strokes imposed was not fixed, care was taken not to kill the victim. Following the beating, the horizontal beam was placed upon the condemned man's shoulders, and he began the long, grueling march to the execution site, usually outside the city walls. A soldier at the head of the procession carried the *titulus*, an inscription written on wood, which stated the defendant's name and the crime for which he had been condemned. Later, this *titulus* was fastened to the victim's cross. When the procession arrived at the execution site, a vertical stake was fixed into the ground. Sometimes the victim was attached to the cross only with ropes. In such a case, the *patibulum* or crossbeam, to which the victim's arms were already bound, was simply affixed to the vertical beam; the victim's feet were then bound to the stake with a few turns of the rope.

"If the victim was attached by nails, he was laid on the ground, with his shoulders on the crossbeam, which was then raised and fixed on top of the vertical beam. The victim's feet were then nailed down against this vertical stake.

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“Without any supplementary body support, the victim would die from muscular spasms and asphyxia in a very short time, certainly within two or three hours. Shortly after being raised on the cross, breathing would become difficult; to get his breath, the victim would attempt to draw himself up on his arms. Initially he would be able to hold himself up for 30 to 60 seconds, but this movement would quickly become increasingly difficult. As he became weaker, the victim would be unable to pull himself up and death would ensue within a few hours.

“In order to prolong the agony, Roman executioners devised two instruments that would keep the victim alive on the cross for extended periods of time. One, known as a *sedile*, was a small seat attached to the front of the cross, about halfway down. This device provided some support for the victim’s body and may explain the phrase used by the Romans ‘to sit on the cross.’ Both Irenaeus and Justin Martyr describe the cross of Jesus as having five extremities rather than four; the fifth was probably the *sedile*. To increase the victim’s suffering, the *sedile* was pointed, thus inflicting horrible pain. The second device added to the cross was the *suppedaneum*, or foot support. It was less painful than the *sedile*, but it also prolonged the victim’s agony. Ancient historians record many cases in which the victim stayed alive on the cross for two or three more days with the use of a *suppedaneum*. The church father Origen writes of having seen a crucified man who survived the whole night and the following day. Josephus refers to a case in which three crucified Jews survived on the cross for three days. During the mass crucifixions following the repression of the revolt of Spartacus in Rome, some of the crucified rebels talked to the soldiers for three days.”<sup>73</sup>

Yeshua’s execution was approved by Pontius Pilate, and it was carried out by Romans in a Roman style—so once again, any claim that the Jewish people are “Messiah killers,” and that the Romans somehow are not, is quite absurd and without support. **All of sinful humanity is responsible for Yeshua’s death.** Crucifixion was a principal way of dying, so that the Messiah’s own word about His mission might be fulfilled:

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life” (John 3:14-15; cf. Numbers 21:9).

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<sup>73</sup> Vassilios Tzaferis, “The Archaeological Evidence for Crucifixion,” in Meinhardt, pp 95-100.

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The three Synoptic Gospels focus their attention on the main event of the crucifixion. Yeshua is crucified at the third hour, or around 9:00 AM,<sup>74</sup> and above His cross bore the inscription "THIS IS YESHUA KING OF THE JEWS" (Matthew 27:36; cf. Mark 15:25; Luke 23:38), just as would be seen on the Roman *titulus*. The charge against Yeshua was that He claimed to be some sort of King. In the Sanhedrin's eyes, Yeshua would be discredited to His followers or those who took interest in His teachings—and in Rome's eyes the Jews would have to look on Yeshua, seeing that Rome had the authority to execute one of their might-be liberators.

It must be interjected that in the Apostle Paul's writing to the Colossians, he does affirm that *something* was nailed to the cross of Yeshua, as he asserts that His sacrifice has "canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Colossians 2:14). Many of today's Christians have actually taken this as being the Torah of Moses, yet does this at all fit the context of what occurs at Golgotha? Not at all. There is ***no hint*** that Yeshua considered His crucifixion to render the Torah completely inoperative. The term *cheirographon* (χειρόγραφον), used in Colossians 2:14, means "a hand-written document, specif. a certificate of indebtedness, account, record of debts" (BDAG).<sup>75</sup> Traditional views of Colossians 2:14 dating back to the Protestant Reformation often associated the certificate of debt as either the record of human sin, or the guilt of human sin incurred before God.<sup>76</sup> Another common view of Colossians 2:14, sees this certificate of debt as connected to the pronouncement of condemnation that hung over Yeshua as He was dying on the cross. Douglas J. Moo, who is not necessarily favorable to the Law of Moses having any continual effect in the post-resurrection era, does, however, correctly describe,

"In causing him to be nailed to the cross, God (the subject of the verb) has provided for the full cancellation of the debt of obedience that we had incurred. Christ took upon himself the penalty that we were under because of

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<sup>74</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*, NASB (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1994), 1341.

<sup>75</sup> BDAG, 1083.

<sup>76</sup> For one example, see John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, reprint (Peterborough, UK: Epworth Press, 2000), 747.

Many Protestant churches today hold services on Good Friday where people can write their sins or transgressions on small pieces of paper, and then actually nail them to a cross in the sanctuary, representative of how the record of human sin has been taken care of by Jesus' sacrifice. This concurs with Colossians 2:14 representing the condemnation upon human sin.

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our disobedience, and his death fully satisfied God's necessary demand for due punishment of that disobedience."<sup>77</sup>

**Indeed, we should rightfully conclude that it was the record of human sin nailed to Yeshua's cross caused by disobedience, its penalty absorbed in His sacrifice**—not the standard in the Law that defines sin. That which stood against us was not God's holy Torah delivered to His people by Moses, but rather the capital penalties within the Torah which condemn sin.<sup>78</sup>

Returning to the scene at Golgotha, if Yeshua had been executed by the Jewish religious leaders, then He would have been stoned. While it would have made for a painful and public death—it would not allow for the people to take a good look at what was happening for several hours. Yeshua is mocked as He is steadily suffocating up on the cross (cf. Psalm 22:7; 42:10; 70:3)—something that both the Jews and Romans present do, religious leaders and soldiers alike: "And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, 'He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Messiah of God, His Chosen One [cf. Isaiah 53:11].' The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, and saying, 'If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!'" (Luke 23:35-37; cf. Mark 15:29-31; Matthew 27:39-42). Matthew's record makes a reference to the people actually quoting from the Tanach, making fun of the Lord with, "HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE *Him* now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Matthew 27:43; cf. Psalm 22:8).

As bad as it is for those looking on to taunt Yeshua to come down from off of the cross and save Himself, the two criminals being executed along with Him are also found insulting Him (Mark 15:32; Matthew 27:44). One of the two mockingly asks Yeshua to save them from execution (Luke 23:39), but the other actually comes to his senses, asking him, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?", and then recognizes, "we indeed *are suffering* justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:40, 41). The thief is actually repentant for what sentenced him to death, acknowledging Yeshua as the Savior, perhaps knowing just enough of the Messianic expectation to see how the One who was entirely innocent is being

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<sup>77</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), pp 211-212.

Commenting on Colossians 2:14, James D.G. Dunn rightly thinks "we should note that it is not the law which is thought of as thus destroyed, but rather its particular condemnation (χεῖρόγραφοι) of transgressions, absorbed in the sacrificial death of the Christ (cf. Rom. 8:3)" (*New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 166).

<sup>78</sup> For further discussion, consult the commentary *Colossians and Philemon for the Practical Messianic* by J.K. McKee.

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unjustly slain. He asks Him, "Yeshua, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" (Luke 23:42), and Yeshua tells him something even better than a future promise of the thief being a part of the Messianic Age: "Truly I say to you, today<sup>79</sup> you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). The two of them, dying that day, would be ushered into Abraham's Bosom, or the Paradise side of Sheol (cf. Luke 16:23ff).

There is certainly drama that occurs as Yeshua's death draws closer between the sixth and ninth hours, or about 12:00 noon to 3:00 PM,<sup>80</sup> because darkness falls over the vicinity of Jerusalem (Mark 15:33; Matthew 27:45; Luke 23:44). In what can appear to be a rather cryptic expression, "At the ninth hour Yeshua cried out with a loud voice, 'ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?' which is translated, 'MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?'" (Mark 15:34; cf. Matthew 27:46). This is a quotation from Psalm 22:1, expressing an alienation from the Father—no doubt caused by Yeshua's having to be sacrificed for *all* human sin. Yet, the Psalm ends with a message of triumph and praise for God, something we can assume is intended by how we know Yeshua would be resurrected from the dead:

"I will tell of Your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You. You who fear the LORD, praise Him; all you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel. For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from him; but when he cried to Him for help, He heard" (Psalm 22:22-24).

When Yeshua speaks forth the Psalm, bystanders there thought He was calling out to Elijah (Mark 15:35; Matthew 27:47, 49), something that some Rabbis of the period apparently did when they were in distress (*b.Avodah Zara* 17b). The sour wine or vinegar offered to Yeshua was apparently done so to try to revive Him (Mark 15:36; Matthew 27:48).

The death of Yeshua triggers some rather significant phenomenon, as the sky has grown dark in the middle of the afternoon (Luke 23:45a). The Lord issues a loud cry with His final breath, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT [Psalm 31:5]<sup>81</sup>" (Luke 23:46; cf. Mark 15:37; Matthew 27:50). At this moment, two groups of people have something communicated to them. The veil in the Temple, separating out the Holy of Holies, rips in two (Mark 15:38; Matthew 27:51a; Luke 23:45b), something that any of the priests present would have noticed, and probably anyone else present. Likewise, the Roman centurion attending to Yeshua's crucifixion recognizes, at the earthquake

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<sup>79</sup> Grk. *sēmeron* (σήμερον); "today, this very day" (BDAG, 921).

"Truly I tell you, this day you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43, Lattimore).

<sup>80</sup> Zodhiates, *Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*, NASB, 1341.

<sup>81</sup> Aland, *GNT*, 305.

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which ensues, “Truly this was the Son of God!<sup>82</sup>” (Matthew 27:54; cf. Mark 15:39) and how “Certainly this man was innocent,” actually issuing some praise to God (Luke 23:47). Matthew also records a later sign, of how “many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many” (Matthew 27:52-53). While certainly a mystery to be pondered, I think we can safely speculate that those who were raised to life here were some of the recently deceased.

While Yeshua could have been sacrificed at any time during the general Passover season to adequately suffice as having prophetically fulfilled the typology of Passover lamb, we should think it most appropriate that Yeshua died at the same time as the main lamb was offered in the Temple on the 14th of Nisan. The Mishnah specifies, “The daily whole offering [of the afternoon] [generally] was slaughtered at half after the eighth hour [after dawn, about 2:30 P.M.] and offered up at half after the ninth hour [about 3:30 P.M.]” (m.*Pesachim* 5:1).<sup>83</sup> Keener indicates, “By expiring at 3:00 p.m., Jesus died about the official time of the evening lamb in the temple.”<sup>84</sup> So when there was a high amount of activity in the Temple precincts—with the most amount of people present preparing for the Passover *seder* that evening—the Temple’s interior curtain split. The pagans present would have noticed the dark sky and earthquake, but the Jews would have most especially noticed the curtain torn. The Talmud further records how in the forty years or so before the destruction of the Second Temple (starting around this time), the doors of the Temple would open and close themselves, likely connected to this:

“Forty years before the destruction of the sanctuary, the lot did not come up in the right hand, and the thread of crimson never turned white, and the westernmost light never shone, and the doors of the courtyard would open by themselves” (b.*Yoma* 39b).<sup>85</sup>

Some of those closest to Yeshua are recognized as having been present at the crucifixion site. Notably, almost all of Yeshua’s followers present at His death are women, including: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, the mother of John and James (sons of Zebedee), and well as various other acquaintances who had followed Him from Galilee (Mark 15:40-41; Matthew 27:55-56; Luke 23:48-49). Because of the low status of women in the

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<sup>82</sup> Grk. *legontes alēthōs Theou huios ēn houtos* (λέγοντες ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς ἦν οὗτος).

Note how *Theou* is in the singular. It would be quite impossible to render this with “Truly this was a son of the *gods*,” as the Roman centurion would in some way have to be acknowledging the One God of the Jews as operating here.

<sup>83</sup> Neusner, *Mishnah*, 236.

<sup>84</sup> Keener, 390.

<sup>85</sup> *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary*.

Cf. France, *NICNT: Matthew*, 1079, fn#27.

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First Century, their presence adjacent to the cross would not have been viewed as some kind of political threat—even if they were known followers of Yeshua—as they would just be dismissed. But, their presence at the death of the Lord does indicate, as Keener observes, “These women had followed Jesus as disciples in whatever ways they could, even ways that would have appeared scandalous in that culture.”<sup>86</sup> Just as the *cheirographon* or indictment of capital penalties would be nailed to Yeshua's cross, the contingent of female Messiah followers present should also be a major clue to us as to the kind of other changes His death will inaugurate—reversing the curse of Genesis 3:16!

It was necessary that the body of Yeshua be taken down before day's end. A certain Joseph of Arimathea, who was a member of the Sanhedrin and a righteous man, received permission from Pontius Pilate to take Yeshua's body and place it in his own stone tomb (Mark 15:43-47; Matthew 27:57-61; Luke 23:51-56). Yeshua's body is wrapped in linen, and placed in the grave. Luke makes the point of recognizing how this Joseph “had not consented to...[the] plan and action” (Luke 23:51) of the Sanhedrin in wanting to condemn Yeshua, and his generosity is shown in that he will allow Him to rest in a tomb that had been hewn for himself. Some of the women from Galilee made notice of where Yeshua's body was placed, as they will use various spices and perfumes for anointing it, being customary to retard the smell of decay (Luke 23:55-56a).

Mark 15:42 tells us that Yeshua had to be interred quickly “because it was the preparation day, that is, the day before the Sabbath,” and Luke 23:54 similarly states, “It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.” Most naturally, readers take this to be the day before the weekly *Shabbat*, Friday evening. Jewish law did prohibit burial on the Sabbath (m.*Shabbat* 23:5), but Sabbath restrictions likely applied to festival days as well, given the dictum “There is no difference between a festival day and the Sabbath day except for preparing food alone” (m.*Megillah* 1:5).<sup>87</sup> Rest would be required on the High Sabbath associated with the Passover, the first day of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:7) occurring on the 15th of Nisan. This should be a very good indication pointing to Yeshua being crucified before the Passover on the 14th of Nisan.

We can all agree that the women prepared for their anointing of Yeshua's corpse before a Sabbath period (cf. Luke 23:56), but was this period only 24 hours, following a Good Friday crucifixion, as is traditionally held? Or, was it possibly a bit longer? Obviously, as soon as the women could go attend to Yeshua's body, they would do so.

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<sup>86</sup> Keener, 392.

<sup>87</sup> Neusner, *Mishnah*, 317.

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We see a good clue that the Day of Preparation on which Yeshua was crucified was not a Friday, because “on the next day, the day after the preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered together with Pilate” (Matthew 27:62), not being called the Sabbath. France points out, “Matthew surprisingly does not draw attention to that embarrassing fact by mentioning the sabbath by name.”<sup>88</sup> Whether the day after the preparation is intended to be the weekly Sabbath or a High Sabbath, these religious officials have been caught violating the Torah, a result of their plot against the Lord and His followers. France, even though holding to a Good Friday crucifixion, thinks that “day of preparation” is used in Matthew 27:62 because it involves “not an ordinary sabbath but also the day of the Passover meal.”<sup>89</sup>

A Wednesday crucifixion would allow for the Marys to go to the tomb as soon as Thursday evening, after a Thursday High Sabbath of Passover, but this runs contrary to how they are actually said to go to the tomb on the first day of the week.<sup>90</sup> The traditional Friday crucifixion or a Thursday crucifixion would allow for the Marys to be at the tomb as soon as Saturday evening or Sunday morning. With the latter two options, either the High Sabbath of Passover occurred on the same day as the weekly Sabbath, Saturday—or a High Sabbath occurred on Friday followed by the weekly Sabbath on Saturday, a Sabbath period of 48 hours. France is probably correct in that “the phrase ‘the Preparation’ does double duty.”<sup>91</sup> But, whether Yeshua was crucified on a Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday also has to consider the Lord’s claim that He will be raised after “three days and three nights” (Matthew 12:40), and the minimum length this time has to be (discussed further).

The narrative of Matthew’s Gospel is most concerned, however, with the fact that the Jewish religious leaders broke protocol on a Sabbath day, and went to meet with Pontius Pilate. For some reason or another, they are not satisfied that the Messiah is now dead. They remember how He has said He will resurrect after three days, and they want to make sure that when that third day after He is dead arrives—that there is a Roman guard at the entombment site. They do not want the Disciples to somehow “fake” Yeshua’s resurrection by stealing His body. Having given in to the demand to execute Him, Pilate simply grants the request to set a guard at the tomb, along with an official seal (Matthew 27:63-66).

The record we see of Yeshua’s death in the Fourth Gospel expands what we see in the Synoptics, adding more details. It specifically intends to connect Yeshua’s death to more Tanach passages, adding some more depth to what

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<sup>88</sup> France, *NICNT: Matthew*, 1093.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Mark 16:2; Matthew 28:1; Luke 24:1.

<sup>91</sup> France, *NICNT: Matthew*, 1093.

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took place. Yeshua is taken to Golgotha to be crucified, having to carry His cross at least some of the way, and being executed between two others His cross does bear the transcription "YESHUA THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (John 19:16-19). John makes the point of recognizing that this was actually "written in Hebrew, Latin *and* in Greek" (John 19:20), meaning that just about anyone seeing this—whether a native of Judea, a Diaspora Jew, one of the Roman soldiers, or a foreign traveler—could clearly see who this Yeshua or Iēsous or Iesus was. The chief priests object to what Pilate writes, as they only want it to say "I am King of the Jews" (John 19:21-22), so Yeshua could be discredited as a messianic figure.

Having hoisted Yeshua onto the cross, the soldiers agree to cast lots for His garments, as they might have some use for them. John makes an appeal to Psalm 22:18 being fulfilled (John 19:23-25a). The same women who the Synoptics indicate were present at the cross are also seen in the Fourth Gospel, with the addition of Mary the wife of Clopas and "the disciple whom He loved," presumably a very young John (John 19:25b-26a). Yeshua's own mother, Mary, is present as well, and He tells her from the cross that this disciple John is now her "son" and she is his "mother," with the indication that such a disciple began to take care of her (John 19:26b-27). With none of the other half-siblings or other Disciples of the Lord present, John must have been the only one who could see to Mary's needs. Furthermore, this could have communicated that Yeshua was no longer her "son," given the salvation history events in play.

More references to Yeshua fulfilling Scripture are made in terms of the sour wine vinegar given to Him, because it is placed on a branch of hyssop, an elemental connection to the Passover lamb's blood (John 19:28-29; cf. Exodus 12:22). After this occurs, all the Lord can say is "It is finished!" and He dies (John 19:30). The verb *teleō* (τέλέω), employed here, can mean "to complete, fulfil, accomplish, and, generally, to execute, perform" (LS),<sup>92</sup> being related to the noun *telos* (τέλος), which itself often means "the goal toward which a movement is being directed, end, goal, outcome" (BDAG; cf. Romans 10:4, Grk.).<sup>93</sup> Within the realm of lexical possibilities, John 19:30 can be rendered with "It is accomplished!" (CJB) or "It has been brought to the goal!" (my translation), speaking of the final atonement for human sin being offered, and full reconciliation between humankind and its Creator now provided for.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> LS, 798.

<sup>93</sup> BDAG, 998.

<sup>94</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray adds,

"After drinking the wine [or vinegar], Jesus uttered his last word known to the Evangelist, τετέλεσται [*telestai*]. The rendering, 'It is finished!' conveys only half the meaning. For the verb τετέλεω fundamentally denotes 'to carry out' the will of somebody, whether of oneself or another,

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The Fourth Gospel asserts that the crucifixion of Yeshua occurred on the Day of Preparation, and not just for the Sabbath, but one that can be viewed as a High Sabbath independent of the normal weekly Sabbath (John 19:31)<sup>95</sup>—supported by the previous assertion of Yeshua dying on “the day of preparation for the Passover” (John 19:14) or “the eve of Passover” (NEB).<sup>96</sup> The legs of those being crucified would have to be broken to accelerate death, but Yeshua was already dead (John 19:32-33); instead He is pierced with a spear, and blood and water pour out (John 19:34), with the author of John confirming that he saw it himself (John 19:35). A direct appeal is made to Yeshua’s sacrifice and the instructions of the Passover lamb (John 19:36; cf. Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12). Such an explicit connection between Yeshua’s sacrifice and the Passover lamb slain in the Torah, in my estimation, makes it quite unlikely that He was offered at any time other than the 14th of Nisan, as the Passover lambs themselves were being killed. Another Tanach passage is referenced in Zechariah 12:10, in that deliverance is found in someone who is pierced (John 19:37).

Joseph of Arimathea receives permission to take Yeshua’s body, being considered a secret disciple out of fear (John 19:38). Nicodemus, who had originally met Yeshua at night, brings about a hundred pounds worth of spices for the body (John 19:39). Yeshua’s body is wrapped in linen, and John actually states that the tomb where He is placed is in a garden adjacent to the crucifixion site (John 19:40-41). Yeshua is laid there rather quickly because of the Day of Preparation (John 19:42). Whether this is before the weekly Sabbath also serving as a High Sabbath, or a High Sabbath, does not matter as far as the entombment was concerned; it simply had to be done quickly, with the final burial matters to be attended to later.

## Three Days and Three Nights

In today’s Messianic community, no part of the death of Yeshua is more controversial than His assertion, “for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matthew 12:40; cf. Jonah 1:17). Even when it is emphasized that our attention as Believers during the Passover season needs to be focused more on what actually happened, than

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and so to fulfill obligations or carry out religious act” (*Word Biblical Commentary: John*, Vol 36 [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987], 352).

To argue that “It is finished!” somehow pertains to a declaration made nullifying the Mosaic Torah, is quite out of place, as Yeshua’s words concern atonement of sins.

<sup>95</sup> “There is nothing, as far as I know...that parallels this expression in the rabbinic literature, i.e., that when a Festival Shabbat falls on a weekly Shabbat, that day is referred to as the ‘great Shabbat’ or ‘high Shabbat’” (Hegg, “The Chronology of the Crucifixion”).

<sup>96</sup> A footnote in the NEB does include the alternative rendering, “It was Friday in Passover.”

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the exact timing of the events, there are often quite a few discussions and debates over the length of time Yeshua's body was actually interred in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. The traditional view of Yeshua having died on Good Friday and resurrected on Easter Sunday morning is frequently thought to not suffice for His claim to be dead "three days and three nights." And this is not only something that many of today's Messianics question, but many Christians as well. Author Dave Hunt expresses his opinion,

"Obviously, had Christ been crucified on Friday, He couldn't possibly have spent three days and three nights in the grave by Sunday morning. The verification of that fact is simple. What was left of Friday afternoon can be counted as day one. All Saturday is day two. Friday and Saturday nights until dawn Sunday total two nights. The period comes up short by one day and one night."<sup>97</sup>

The traditional Good Friday-Easter Sunday scenario leaves Yeshua dead for only 36 hours or so, and so given the Lord's own reference to His being dead "three days and three nights," it is not surprising why many have insisted that He be interred for a full 72 hours. Yeshua dying on a Wednesday, and then being resurrected sometime between the Saturday evening and Sunday morning following, does seem to make sense, and it has become what is frequently heard among those who have questioned the traditional view. Yet, insisting that Yeshua remain interred for a full 72 hours has to be counterbalanced with the Apostolic Scriptures' own consistent affirmation that Yeshua would resurrect "on the third day" (Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Luke 9:22; 24:7, 46; Acts 10:40), *te triē hēmera* (τῆ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ). The Jewish religious leaders insisted that Joseph of Arimathea's tomb remain secured with a Roman guard "until the third day" (Matthew 12:40).

From a textual standpoint, one has to weigh the "three days and three nights" sign of Jonah, together with the understanding that Yeshua was expected to resurrect sometime on the third day after His execution. Recognizing that Yeshua was to be resurrected sometime on the third day, those who hold to the traditional Good Friday-Easter Sunday reckoning feel that they have support. They do rightly point out that in the Tanach, any part of a day is considered as being a whole day:

- **Joseph's brothers were put in prison for three days, but were actually released on the third day:** "So he put them all together in prison for three days. Now Joseph said to them on the third day, 'Do this and live, for I fear God: if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison; but as for *the rest of you*, go, carry grain for the famine of your households, and bring your youngest brother to me, so your

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<sup>97</sup> Dave Hunt, *How Close Are We?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993), 170.

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words may be verified, and you will not die.' And they did so" (Genesis 42:17-20).

- **Queen Esther told the Jews in Susa to fast for three days, either day or night, but then on the third day she readied herself to see the king:** "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish.'...Now it came about on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace in front of the king's rooms, and the king was sitting on his royal throne in the throne room, opposite the entrance to the palace" (Esther 4:16; 5:1).
- **David feeds an Egyptian who had not eaten for three days and three nights, having been left behind three days prior:** "They gave him a piece of fig cake and two clusters of raisins, and he ate; then his spirit revived. For he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights. David said to him, 'To whom do you belong? And where are you from?' And he said, 'I am a young man of Egypt, a servant of an Amalekite; and my master left me behind when I fell sick three days ago'" (1 Samuel 30:12-13).

After Yeshua was resurrected, the Lord disguised Himself and overheard two of His followers talking about what has transpired in Jerusalem, on their walk to Emmaus. They tell Him about the crucifixion scene, how "it is the third day since these things happened" (Luke 24:21), and how they had heard that some women encountered Him alive (Luke 24:22-24). The resurrected Yeshua reveals Himself to these followers (Luke 24:25-35), and Luke makes the point that "beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures" (Luke 24:27). It had been less than 72 hours following Yeshua's death, and He was now resurrected. But had He been executed only one-and-a-half actual days prior?

It does seem that the common alternative to the traditional Good Friday-Eastern Sunday scenario—a Wednesday crucifixion with Yeshua resurrected by Sunday—comes up short because of the testimony of Him being resurrected on the third day, rather than after the third day. Among Messianics, Tim Hegg once advocated a 72 hour Wednesday-Saturday evening/Sunday morning scenario, but then changed to now adhering to the traditional Good Friday-Easter Sunday scenario—and he is notably not alone. Various other Messianic ministries, when seeing the evidence that any part of a day can constitute a full day, have gone from advocating a full 72 hour

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chronology for Yeshua's death, to now advocating the traditional Good Friday-Easter Sunday scenario as is taught during Holy Week in most churches.

I want you to understand that Yeshua the Messiah can surely fulfill His own words by being executed on Friday, and then being resurrected by Sunday morning. I attended church for many years, going to a special Good Friday service, and later an Easter Sunday service (something mind you that was almost completely devoid of references to the Easter bunny or various other side traditions) and found them to be quite spiritually edifying. Beyond the chronology issues, I understand the pull of some Messianic teachers who want to make Christians examining their Hebraic Roots easily understand Yeshua's commemoration of the Passover, followed by His death and resurrection, in terms that they already can relate to: the chronology of Good Friday-Easter Sunday. From this perspective:

1. Yeshua kept the Passover with His Disciples on the 14th of Nisan, the official date of the feast, with all of those in Jerusalem, a Thursday evening.
2. Yeshua was executed on the 15th of Nisan, the Preparation Day for the weekly Sabbath, a Friday (the High Sabbath of Passover).
3. Yeshua was resurrected either as the 16th of Nisan closed, a Saturday, or on the morning of the 17th of Nisan, a Sunday.

A Christian Believer who has held to the traditional Good Friday-Easter Sunday chronology, devoid of any Passover connection, only has to modify a few things here, and can be enriched with some Hebraic connections.

While I think that Yeshua could fulfill prophecy via this scenario, Messianics who adhere to it are most concerned with insisting that the Day of Preparation on which Yeshua was crucified (John 19:31) precede the weekly Sabbath, and not the Passover feast itself. Hegg asserts, "If there is any conclusion to which I have come, it is this: the crucifixion did take place on a Friday."<sup>98</sup> In contrast, if Yeshua were crucified on the Day of Preparation for the High Sabbath of Passover and not a weekly Sabbath exclusively, occurring on the 14th of Nisan, then this means that the Last Supper had to be held on the 13th of Nisan. The Last Supper then is either not a *seder* meal, contrary to the witness of the three Synoptics, is a *seder* meal held according to a competing sectarian calendar, **or** as we have proposed was a *seder* meal deliberately held a day early because of emergency circumstances.

Sadly, it has been my experience that there are various Messianics out there who are more concerned with Yeshua's adherence to the strict letter of the Law, rather than acknowledging how the year of His execution was something exceptional, with less-than-normal circumstances present. More

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<sup>98</sup> Hegg, "The Chronology of the Crucifixion."

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significance is probably placed upon *seder* specifics, than the sacrifice Yeshua would offer up of Himself. The reason why the Good Friday-Easter Sunday scenario is being adopted by some Messianics, is simply because they require Yeshua to demonstrate a strict and rigid level of Torah keeping—without any exceptions—to guide their exegesis. I do not disagree with the possibility that an execution of the Lord on the 15th of Nisan, could suffice for prophetic fulfillment (although it would have been an execution occurring on a High Sabbath). But, it is far better to see Him executed on the 14th of Nisan, given the Fourth Gospel's explicit references to the Passover instructions from the Pentateuch (John 19:36; cf. Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12), and not any other prescribed offerings during the season.

If Yeshua had claimed that He would be entombed for “three days and nights,” then the traditional Good Friday-Easter Sunday chronology would seem to have some support. Only touching on three actual days would then be necessary to fulfill the Lord's word. However, Yeshua claimed that He would be dead for “three days **and** three nights” (Matthew 12:40),<sup>99</sup> which many Bible readers, myself included, think implies something a little longer than Good Friday-Easter Sunday. At present among Messianic interpreters, the two main options which are proposed are Yeshua being dead a full 72 hours, and half this length at 36 hours. I would suggest a third option, where we consider “three days and three nights” to involve Yeshua being dead with three instances of daylight and three instances of dusk—where they are touched upon, but the actual length of time was likely around 52-54 hours.

One of the most cryptic words that some people encounter in the Apostolic Scriptures, is the Apostle Paul's claim that Yeshua the Messiah “was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:4).<sup>100</sup> I have encountered Messianic Believers who have actually had their faith shaken a little, because in their minds they have failed to find any specific prophecy that speaks of Yeshua being raised from the dead on the third day.

From a general perspective, there are, in fact various instances in the Tanach where some important event is associated with the third day (Hosea 6:1-2; Genesis 22:4; 2 Kings 20:5; Jonah 2:1-9; cf. Exodus 19:10; Esther 5:1; Ezra 6:15; Genesis 40:1-23; Leviticus 7:17-18; Judges 20; Joshua 1:11; 3:2).<sup>101</sup> Looking at these patterns, Michael L. Brown concludes that “Paul [has] the right to say that the Messiah rose from the dead on the third day according to the Scriptures.”<sup>102</sup> Yet among the Tanach passages of redemptive or spiritual

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<sup>99</sup> Grk. *treis hēmeras kai treis nuktas* (τρεις ἡμέρας καὶ τρεις νύκτας).

<sup>100</sup> Or, “in accordance with what the *Tanakh* says” (CJB).

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus, Volume 3: Messianic Prophecy Objections* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), pp 182-183.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 183; cf. Thiselton, pp 1195-1197.

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activity occurring on the third day, one should immediately jump out at us as relating to the resurrection of the Messiah:

"Come, let us return to the LORD. For He has torn *us*, but He will heal us; He has wounded *us*, but He will bandage us. He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day [*b'yom ha'sh'lishi yeqimeinu*, הַשְּׁלִישִׁי יִקְמֵנוּ, בַּיּוֹם],<sup>103</sup> that we may live before Him."

Most frequently in today's Messianic world, and even among many Christians, Hosea 6:1-2 is viewed as relating to some future end-time scenario. It is concluded, in connection with words like Psalm 90:4, that this is describing the last two thousand years since the First Coming of Yeshua, and that in the third thousand year period the Second Coming will take place. While this is a popular view to be sure, it really does not do justice to the surrounding text.<sup>104</sup> The issue at hand is *the means* by which God will restore Israel, both of Ephraim and Judah, who have committed sins before Him (Hosea 6:3-5). Of important notice is the Prophet's assertion, "For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6). But most important to understanding the being raised up on the third day, the Prophet says, "like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; there they have dealt treacherously against Me" (Hosea 6:7). It would be one thing if Israel, Ephraim addressed first and Judah addressed second, were compared to those who came out of Egypt, or those who entered into the Promised Land led by Joshua. But here, Israel is compared *k'adam* (כְּאָדָם), "like men" (KJV), meaning of course "like humanity." The raising up that is expected to occur on the third day, while immediately affecting Israel, has to take place because of a problem that affects all of humankind.

I do not believe it is difficult at all to see how Hosea 6:1-2 is indeed a prophecy referring to the death and resurrection of Messiah Yeshua, as the Lord was resurrected on the third day. Yeshua's death and resurrection, while immediately affecting Israel, is offered on behalf of all sinful humanity. It is quite notable that the Septuagint renders the Hebrew verb *qum* (קָם) as *anistēmi* (ἀνίστημι), which can mean "to raise up by bringing back to life, raise, raise up" (BDAG), used in a number of places for the resurrection of the Messiah.<sup>105</sup> Here, we see how Israel stands as a proxy for all of sinful humankind, and how Israel's restoration is to come in its identification with something that is to last for two days, with them able to be standing by the third day. An appropriate parallel with Hosea 6:1-2 in the Apostolic Scriptures would be in recognizing how Believers are to be "buried with Him through

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<sup>103</sup> Grk. LXX *en tē hēmera tē tritē* (ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ); cf. Thiselton, 1195.

<sup>104</sup> Consult the FAQ, "6,000 Year Teaching."

<sup>105</sup> BDAG, 83; cf. John 6:39, 44; Acts 2:24, 32; 3:26; 13:44.

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baptism into death, so that as Messiah was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4; cf. Colossians 2:12).

The Wednesday crucifixion chronology, while rightly recognizing that Yeshua entombed for only a day-and-a-half is insufficient, oversteps the expectation of Him being resurrected on the third day by insisting that three days and three nights be a full 72 hours. The traditional Good Friday-Easter Sunday chronology, while rightly recognizing that any part of a day can count for a day, typically has the Lord executed after the Passover itself has been commemorated, and not during the offering of the Passover lambs. The traditional scenario also does not do total justice to Yeshua's claim that He would be dead "three days and three nights," even if this does not have to be a full 72 hours. It is notable, that in reverting to the traditional chronology for Yeshua's death, Hegg now admits that he does not really know how to interpret the sign of Jonah given by the Lord:

"We are left...with wondering exactly how to interpret the 'sign of Jonah' in our Matthew text and if an alternative interpretation might fit with the chronology we have outlined....Is it possible that Yeshua's comparison of His own entombment with that of Jonah's time in the fish was not given as a chronological statement but has a different import?"<sup>106</sup>

The Thursday crucifixion scenario does, in fact, do justice to facts that Yeshua would be entombed for three days and three nights according to the sign of Jonah, but at the same time resurrected by the third day. It accounts for Hosea 6:1-2, in that Yeshua would be dead for a full two days, but by the third day would be raised. It also involves three daylight periods and three dusk periods:

1. Yeshua and His Disciples have their Last Supper as a *seder* meal on the 13th of Nisan, a Wednesday night. They deliberately held their *seder* early because of the Lord's impending death. However, due to the tens of thousands of lambs being slaughtered in the Temple, they probably had all the proper elements they needed for their meal.
2. Yeshua the Messiah is executed at Golgotha and dies around 3:00 PM on the 14th of Nisan, the same time when the main lamb is being slaughtered in the Temple, a Thursday. Yeshua's body is taken down before sunset, as it was the Day of Preparation for the Passover, affecting both the High Sabbath and weekly Sabbath that would follow.
3. Yeshua the Messiah has been dead for a period involving part of Thursday day and all night Thursday (day/night 1), all day

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<sup>106</sup> Hegg, "The Chronology of the Crucifixion."

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Friday and all night Friday (day/night 2), and all day Saturday and into dusk or night on Saturday (day/night 3). Yeshua was resurrected by the third day, even though it was neither a full 72 hours nor the traditional 36 hours.

A Thursday crucifixion chronology is actually the most commonly proposed among interpreters, after the traditional Good Friday-Easter Sunday chronology.<sup>107</sup> A Thursday scenario, unlike the Good Friday-Easter Sunday scenario, does have the advantage of having Yeshua's death involve three days and three nights, but also allows Him to be resurrected on the third day. It simply extends the view that any part of a day or night accounts for a full day or night. A Thursday crucifixion chronology also factors in Hosea 6:1-2 as a death and resurrection prophecy of the Messiah, where by the third day an Israel identified with Him would be raised. **The Thursday crucifixion chronology is one we favor.**

### The Resurrection of the Messiah

It is sad to say this, but what is probably the most important part of the narrative beginning at Yeshua's crucifixion and death—**His resurrection** on the third day—is the most under-discussed aspect of all of the events among today's Messianics. While our faith community tends to have a good handle with wanting to make connections between the Last Supper and Passover *seder*, and also the Passover lamb and sacrifice of the Messiah—we often do not know what to do with the resurrection of the Lord or what it means. Is this just the result of a general avoidance of discussing the aspects of “death” altogether? Or is it because, once again, there are some issues we might have with the Lord's resurrection that we do not really know how to handle? Do we so not want to have any association with the questionable traditions of Easter Sunday, that we go overboard and fail to discuss the Messiah's resurrection itself?

In today's mainstream Christian thought, it is simply assumed that Yeshua the Messiah resurrected on Sunday morning, and so it should be no surprise why the Lord's resurrection is honored on Resurrection Sunday (many churches do make an honest effort to not use the term “Easter”). Yet, whether or not Yeshua was actually raised from the dead on Sunday morning can be challenged from the Greek text of the Synoptics:

“When the Sabbath was over [*Kai diagenomenou tou Sabbatou, Kai diaγeνομένου τοῦ σαββάτου*], Mary Magdalene, and Mary the *mother* of James, and Salome, bought spices, so that they might come and anoint

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<sup>107</sup> Cf. Longenecker, “Preparation, Day of,” in *ISBE*, 3:953-954.

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Him. Very early on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen” (Mark 16:1-2).

“Now after the Sabbath [*Opse de sabbatōn*, Ὀψε̄ δε̄ σαββάτων], as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave” (Matthew 28:1).

“But on the first day of the week [*Tē de mia tōn sabbatōn*, Τῆ̄ δε̄ μιᾶ̄ τῶν σαββάτων], at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared” (Luke 24:1).

All three of these witnesses indicate the Marys’ intent to go and anoint the body of Yeshua with various spices and ointments, as it would retard the smell of decay. (Obviously following the death of Yeshua, there was no morgue available, where the body could be refrigerated until interment.) We can safely assume that they did make it to the gravesite, as early as they could be there, on Sunday morning. The Marys’ intention to be at the tomb as soon as they could, by Sunday morning, should immediately cause us to see a critical problem in the Wednesday crucifixion scenario: as after the High Sabbath of Passover on Thursday they could have been at the gravesite by Thursday evening or Friday morning. Only a Thursday crucifixion or Friday crucifixion fits the evidence of the Marys being at the tomb by Sunday morning (discussed previously).

Both Mark and Luke indicate that the Marys had arrived at Yeshua’s gravesite by Sunday morning, but Matthew’s witness interjects something that we need not overlook. The clause which begins Matthew 28:1 is *Opse de sabbatōn* (Ὀψε̄ δε̄ σαββάτων), with the preposition *opse* (ὀψε) notably able to mean “late in the day, at even” (LS).<sup>108</sup> The 1901 American Standard Version opens Matthew 28:1 with “Now late on the sabbath day,” followed by Lattimore’s rendering, “Late on the sabbath.” While some may think that the inclusion of “...as it began to dawn toward...” in Matthew 28:1 settles the fact that this was actually in the morning hours, the verb *epiphōskō* (ἐπιφώσκω) fully means “to draw towards dawn” (LS),<sup>109</sup> something which in Hebraic time reckoning begins in the evening. While some are inclined to think that Matthew is just using Jewish-specific language to describe what is entirely a Sunday morning event,<sup>110</sup> I would suggest that Matthew’s witness interjects something additional into the record, especially given the occurrence of the earthquake (Matthew 28:2). In its entry for *epiphōskō*, AMG explains,

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<sup>108</sup> LS, 582.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Nolland, pp 1244-1245.

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"In the evening of the Sabbath when the Jewish day was drawing on towards the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went (or better, set out). It does not appear that they actually came at this time to visit the sepulcher, perhaps being delayed by the great earthquake (Matt. 28:2) which preceded our Lord's resurrection."<sup>111</sup>

Matthew's interjection of *Opse de sabbatōn*, more correctly regarding "Late on the Sabbath," indicates that the Marys' intention was to go to the gravesite of Yeshua as soon as the weekly Sabbath was over—in our estimation, having been preceded by the Passover High Sabbath on Friday, and now the weekly Sabbath on Saturday. They were stopped from proceeding, because as the Sabbath day closed, in the dusk moments, the earthquake signaling Yeshua's resurrection occurred. While the Marys would try again on Sunday morning, discovering the empty tomb, **this would mean that Yeshua did not actually resurrect from the dead on Sunday morning—but actually Saturday evening.** The witness of the Synoptics that follows only states that the empty tomb was discovered on Sunday morning.

There can be a great deal of unnecessary discussion that occurs among some Messianics, specifically as it concerns the Gospels' usage of "first day of the week," appearing in the Greek as *mian sabbatōn* (μίαν σαββάτων, Matthew 28:1) or *mia tōn sabbatōn* (μὴ τῶν σαββάτων, Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1). Confusion has been caused because a version like Young's Literal Translation renders these clauses as "the first of [the] sabbaths." Some people, seeing the term *sabbaton* (σάββατον) multiple times in a single verse, assume that something is up when in one place it is rendered as "Sabbath," and in another place it is rendered as "week." This has led to all sorts of proposals, one being that "first of [the] sabbaths" is not really the Marys arriving at the tomb on Sunday morning, but instead them arriving at the tomb on the first Sabbath of the counting of the *omer* toward *Shavuot*. While this might sound good at first glance, it fails to take into consideration the flexibility of uses that not only the Greek *sabbaton* possesses, but also its Hebrew progenitor *Shabbat* (שַׁבָּת).

Within the instructions about the counting of the *omer*, Leviticus 23:15 says that it is to involve "seven complete sabbaths" or *sheva Shabbatot temimot* (שִׁבְעַת שַׁבְּתוֹת תְּמִימוֹת). Later in Leviticus 25, though, we see that Jubilee years are determined by a count of "seven sabbaths of years" (Leviticus 25:8) or *sheva shabbatot shanim* (שִׁבְעַת שַׁבְּתוֹת שָׁנִים). This latter usage of "sabbath" very clearly means "seven weeks of years" (RSV, NRSV, NJPS, ESV), just as the actual counting of the *omer* toward *Shavuot* is not determined by the weekly

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<sup>111</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993), 645.

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Sabbath, but actually periods of seven-day weeks (cf. Deuteronomy 16:9).<sup>112</sup> Lexically speaking, one finds how the term *Shabbat*, while frequently meaning “day of rest, sabbath,” can also as the plural *Shabbatot* mean “weeks” (CHALOT).<sup>113</sup>

When the Hebrew Tanach was translated into Greek, the only term really available at the translators’ disposal for the concept of “week” for the Septuagint was *hebdomas* (ἑβδομάς), simply meaning “the number seven or a number of seven” (LS, Leviticus 23:15 and 25:8, LXX).<sup>114</sup> By the First Century, though, the Hebrew loan word *sabbaton* (σάββατον) was used in the Greek-speaking Jewish community, with very much the same flexibility as *Shabbat*. “[T]he Greek term *sábbaton*...[was used] in the diaspora. The plural *tá sábbata* may mean one sabbath, several sabbaths, or the whole week (like the Hebrew term)” (TDNT).<sup>115</sup>

While it may seem odd to us today, the term “Sabbath” to a First Century Jew could mean “week,” and it is in various places used in precisely this way. In Luke 18:12, for example, we see a Jewish person say “I fast twice a week,” *nēsteuō dis tou sabbatou* (νηστεύω δις τοῦ σαββάτου), which would literally be “I fast twice on the sabbath” (LITV)—but this really makes no sense as fasting typically lasts an entire day or longer (a period of not eating between breakfast and supper can hardly be regarded as a “fast”), and so the translation of *sabbatou* as “week” is justified. In the *Didache*, from the late First Century C.E., it is said that the Jews “fast on the second and the fifth day of the week” (8:1), *deutera sabbatōn kai pemptē* (δευτέρα σαββάτων καὶ πέμπτη), meaning twice a week.<sup>116</sup> Here, the plural *sabbatōn* or “sabbaths” is used. It here likewise has to represent the “week,” as it would again make no sense for one to fast two times on the Sabbath day or Saturday.

What would have been the highlight for the ancient Jewish week? *The Sabbath occurring every seven days*. So, should we be too surprised that the “Sabbath” also affects the terminology “week”? As Nolland accounts, the dual usage of *sabbaton* in Matthew 28:1 is not irregular: “there can be no doubt about the sense—[as it] uses *σαββάτα* for ‘sabbath’...in its first use and for ‘week’ in its second use.”<sup>117</sup> It stands justified to recognize that the Marys did arrive at Yeshua’s tomb on Sunday morning. But, simply because they arrived

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<sup>112</sup> Note how most versions render *sheva Shabbatot temimot* in Leviticus 23:15 as “seven full weeks” or something close (RSV, NIV, NRSV, ATS, NJPS, ESV, HCSB, CJB, et. al.).

<sup>113</sup> William L. Holladay, ed., *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, the Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1988), 360.

<sup>114</sup> LS, 220.

<sup>115</sup> E. Lohse, “*sábbaton*,” in Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 989.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. BDAG, 910.

<sup>117</sup> Nolland, 1244 fn#3.

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at the tomb on Sunday morning by no means indicates that the seventh-day Sabbath has somehow been Divinely transferred to Sunday or invalidated, *and* neither does it mean that Yeshua's resurrection has somehow validated the Saddusaical reckoning of the counting of the *omer* which began on a Sunday (discussed further). All this means is that the Marys arrived at the gravesite to anoint Yeshua's body as soon as they could, and Sunday morning—following the delaying earthquake when everything was safe—was the earliest time.

When the women arrive at the tomb, they do ask who will roll the stone away that has sealed it, but they see that it has already been moved. They enter in, and rather than seeing a shrouded corpse, they see two angels sitting (Mark 16:3-5; Matthew 28:2-3; Luke 24:2-3). **The Lord Yeshua has already resurrected from the dead**, as He told them He would, and the Roman guard has been scared away (Matthew 28:4). They are told by the angels that Yeshua has been raised just as He said He would, and that the women are to tell His Disciples, in particular Peter, so that He can meet them in Galilee (Mark 16:6-8; Matthew 28:5-8; Luke 24:5-7). As the women leave the tomb, they actually encounter the risen Yeshua, they worship Him, and He tells them to go tell the Disciples to meet Him in Galilee (Mark 16:9-10; Matthew 28:9-10; Luke 24:8-10). When they hear what has transpired, the main Disciples largely refuse to believe the report (Mark 16:11; Luke 24:11), but Peter goes to the tomb and only sees the linen shroud that the Lord's body had been wrapped in, being amazed (Luke 24:12). We should think that the other Disciples were mostly concerned about their own welfare, given the tenuous circumstances of recent days. With the Sabbath period now over, they will be free to leave Jerusalem, but a mob might be looking for them.

Matthew interjects how the Roman guard reports to the chief priests how Yeshua's body is now missing. I am not sure that the Romans told them that Yeshua was raised from the dead, but all they knew is that there was an earthquake and then some kind of supernatural events. The chief priests give the Roman soldiers money for them to only say that the Disciples stole the body, and they promise that should they get into any trouble with their superiors, they will take care of it. The intention, for sure, was to quell any word that Yeshua might have been resurrected from the dead (Matthew 28:11-14). Matthew's narrative word is, "they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, *and is to this day*" (Matthew 28:15), which would have likely been a few decades after the actual resurrection at the composition of Matthew's Gospel.

We have to remember that Yeshua's resurrection did not only affect the Eleven main Disciples of the Lord (minus Judas), but also other people who followed Him. Mark 16:12 indicates that Yeshua appeared to two who were walking to the country, something expanded upon by Luke in Yeshua's

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encounter with the two on the road to Emmaus, a town adjacent to Jerusalem (Luke 24:13). While walking, the risen Yeshua walks alongside them, although they do not recognize who He is (Luke 24:14-16). The Lord asks the two what they are talking about (Luke 24:17), and Cleopas answers Him, "Are You the only one visiting Jerusalem and unaware of the things which have happened here in these days?" (Luke 24:18). The two tell Him about how Yeshua was crucified, and how they had both seen the empty tomb. But, they express doubts as they had not seen the resurrected Yeshua themselves (Luke 24:19-24).

Hearing this, Yeshua asks the two, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:25-26). The Lord then explains the Messianic expectation from the Torah and the Prophets (Luke 24:27). The two disciples, approaching the village, ask Him to join them because it was evening (Luke 24:28-29). They recline to eat, and taking the bread and blessing it—the *matzah* for the week of Unleavened Bread (Luke 24:30)—they immediately recognize who this man is as the Messiah, and so Yeshua vanishes away (Luke 24:31). They ask themselves, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32). They return to Jerusalem at that moment to meet with the Eleven Disciples, reporting how they have seen the resurrected Yeshua (Luke 24:33-34). Luke narrates, "They *began* to relate their experiences on the road and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24:35).

The Eleven Disciples have not followed Yeshua's instruction to meet Him in Galilee; they are still in Jerusalem huddled down and afraid. The other Messiah followers, who encountered Him on the road to Emmaus, have quickly gone back to Jerusalem—but their report is dismissed (Mark 16:13). Presumably, sometime late on Sunday evening while the Eleven are eating, Yeshua then simply appears to them, and "He reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who had seen Him after He had risen" (Mark 16:14; cf. Luke 24:36).

Luke records how "they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit" (Luke 24:37). Yeshua confirms to them that He is no ghost, but that He has real hands, feet, and a body (Luke 24:38-40). The Disciples are noticeably excited, and to show them that He really was resurrected and is no apparition or specter, Yeshua asks them for something to eat, being handed some broiled fish (Luke 24:41-42). While Yeshua in His resurrected state possess the power to transport Himself at will from place to place, He can still eat food. Just as He did to those on the road to Emmaus, Yeshua explained to them His fulfillment of the Scriptures about suffering, dying, and resurrecting on the third day (Luke 24:43-46). Yeshua announces

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His intention that the Disciples be able witnesses of these events, being sent forth with power from Jerusalem, to proclaim the good news of repentance and forgiveness to all (Luke 24:47-49).

While it is easy to think that the remaining narrative of the Synoptics (Mark 16:15-20; Matthew 28:16-20; Luke 24:50-53) deals with only the few days or so following Yeshua's resurrection, He was actually present with His followers an additional forty days until His ascension into Heaven (Acts 1:3)—just under six of the seven total weeks of the counting of the *omer* to *Shavuot*/Pentecost. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit would be poured out on the Believers so that they could now accomplish the mission and tasks that Yeshua had left for them, with His sacrificial work now completed.

The Fourth Gospel adds important details to what the Synoptics record of what takes place in the moments following Yeshua's resurrection. Mary Magdalene arrives at the gravesite when it was still dark, very early in the morning, and sees the stone removed (John 20:1). She runs to Simon Peter and John, announcing that the Lord is gone (John 20:2). Peter and John go to the tomb, enter in, and they see the various linen wrappings (John 20:3-7). John, who had arrived just ahead of Peter to the scene, believes that Yeshua is resurrected (John 20:8), but the other disciples present did not fully understand and they go away (John 20:9-10). Yet, hearing and seeing that the body of Yeshua was gone, what would they have actually thought? Did some of Yeshua's detractors steal His remains? The body could not have decomposed in such a short time. All John 20:9 says is, "they did not understand the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead."

Some disciples leave the scene of the gravesite—not believing that He has been resurrected, even though Yeshua's body is gone. *Stupidly, they just leave.* Mary Magdalene steps into the tomb (John 20:11). She sees two angels sitting where Yeshua's body had rested, and they ask her why she is crying (John 20:12). She simply responds with, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him" (John 20:13). At this moment, she turns around and sees a man standing, who also asks her why she is crying—not knowing that this was actually Yeshua (John 20:14-15a). She thinks it is actually the gardener, and asks this "gardener" where Yeshua's body is so she can take it away (John 20:15b). All Yeshua has to say to her is "Mary!" and she recognizes that it is her Rabbi (John 20:16). Yeshua instructs her not to grab Him, an indication that she cannot prevent Him from His eventual departure to the Father in Heaven (John 20:17). Even though Yeshua has been resurrected from the dead, He will soon leave for Heaven.

Mary Magdalene tells the Disciples that she has encountered the risen Yeshua (John 20:18). On that Sunday evening, for fear of their lives, the Disciples have locked themselves away. This does not matter for their risen Lord, as He simply appears to them (John 20:19), showing them the wounds

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on His hands and side—with the Disciples rejoicing (John 20:20). Yeshua issues peace to them, and breathes on them so that they can receive of the Holy Spirit (John 20:21-22), including some specific power regarding sins (John 20:23).

The disciple Thomas was not present to witness the appearance of Yeshua, and how He was resurrected from the dead (John 20:24). Even though the others tell him that they have seen the Lord, Thomas will not believe, asserting, “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe” (John 20:25). John says that eight days actually pass, and then Yeshua appears again, *with* Thomas now present (John 20:26). He simply says to him, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing” (John 20:27). Thomas’ skepticism totally vanishes, and the narrative actually records that he recognizes Yeshua’s Divinity in the declaration “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).<sup>118</sup> While Thomas believes Yeshua because he has seen Him, the Lord says nonetheless, “Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed” (John 20:29). And Thomas did believe, because according to early Church history, he made his way proclaiming the good news into Parthia (Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.1.1), and according to local tradition down into India as well—one of the largest geographical areas of any of the original Disciples of the Messiah.

The witness of the Apostle Paul, in his writing to the Corinthians, adds even more details than what is seen in the Gospels regarding Yeshua’s post-resurrection appearances. He says, “He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles” (1 Corinthians 15:5-7). After His ascension into Heaven, Yeshua also appeared several years later to Paul himself, on the road to Damascus (1 Corinthians 15:8).<sup>119</sup>

## Yeshua as the Firstfruits of the Resurrection

The resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah is **the most important event** for our Biblical faith—even more important than the theophany of Mount Sinai, as important as that is. The Apostle Paul is clear to assert, “if there is no

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<sup>118</sup> To claim that this is simply Thomas using the First Century equivalent of “Good Lord!” or “Oh my God!” fails to take into consideration that only up until the late Twentieth Century, such sayings were often considered to be some kind of violation of the Third Commandment.

<sup>119</sup> For a further discussion about the post-resurrection events, and the differences we see among the four Gospels, consult the relevant sections of Walter C. Kaiser, Peter H. Davids, F.F. Bruce, and Manfred T. Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), especially pp 506-508.

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resurrection of the dead, not even Messiah has been raised; and if Messiah has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain" (1 Corinthians 15:13-14). Without an historically sustainable resurrection of Messiah Yeshua, then not only is the gospel message of His salvation untrue, but we have no final victory over the power of sin. Those who have testified of His resurrection have led us astray, and full communion between humanity and its Creator cannot be restored via acceptance of the gospel. Yet, if Yeshua is resurrected, then it assures us not only of such final victory, but also guarantees us the future resurrection of deceased saints, and the *complete unfolding* of the Father's plan of salvation history in future time.

Within evangelical Christianity, the resurrection of Yeshua is certainly a major centerpiece of not only Holy Week, but also teaching and preaching and spiritual reflection throughout the year. Quoted in many churches throughout the world, the Apostles' Creed rightly emphasizes the centrality of the resurrection for people of faith—not only the resurrection of Yeshua—but of His Second Coming to judge the world and the future resurrection of the dead:

"I also believe in Jesus Christ his only son, our Lord, conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, dead and buried; he descended into hell, rose again the third day, ascended into heaven, sat down at the right hand of the Father, thence he is to come to judge the living and the dead."<sup>120</sup>

The doctrine of resurrection *significantly* separates the Bible from pagan religion. Whereas both the Bible and paganism (Ancient Near Eastern and classical Greco-Roman religion for our purposes) largely affirm some kind of a disembodied afterlife—and Yeshua Himself was in Sheol or the netherworld for a short time (Luke 23:42-43; 1 Peter 3:18-20)—the Biblical message runs quite contrary to the pagan message **as the entire person** of both body and consciousness are to be restored to wholeness (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:23), and in paganism the body is often discarded as some kind of garbage.<sup>121</sup> *In Scripture, any kind of a disembodied afterlife is something only intermediate, and is not at all permanent.* In the Biblical sense, salvation is

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<sup>120</sup> Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, eds., *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 26.

<sup>121</sup> For a description of what might be termed "holistic dualism," meaning that while the body and consciousness of a person can be separated—this is by no means an ideal or permanent condition, consult John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); J.K. Chamblin, "Psychology," in Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), pp 766-767.

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not to be exclusively understood in terms of “going to Heaven” when you die, but salvation is consummated in receiving a resurrected and restored body similar to Yeshua’s when He was resurrected, then being ushered into the Messianic Kingdom (cf. Hebrews 9:28). While the good Jewish Pharisee Paul did affirm that after death he would depart to be with the Messiah in Heaven (Philippians 1:21-23), he also rightly emphasized the reality of the resurrection for the saints:

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Yeshua the Messiah; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:20-21).

N.T. Wright explains how “the early Christian belief in hope beyond death belongs demonstrably on the Jewish, not the pagan, map....the early Christian future hope centered firmly on resurrection. The first Christians did not simply believe in life after death; they virtually never spoke of simply going to heaven when they died...When they did speak of heaven as a postmortem destination, they seemed to regard this heavenly life as a temporary stage on the way to the eventual resurrection of the body.”<sup>122</sup> And indeed, too many of us forget that our material bodies are very much a part of our beings, every bit as much as an immaterial consciousness. So even if we are multi-dimensional creatures made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26), it is not His intention that our body be in one location, and our consciousness in another location, permanently after death—as any period of separation of the two is appropriately described as being “naked” (2 Corinthians 5:3). Wright has done us all a good service in emphasizing how the Bible is more concerned with the “life *after* the afterlife,” or the future Messianic Kingdom to come.<sup>123</sup>

The resurrection of Yeshua itself, and His conquering of physical death, certainly did signal some major transitions within the spiritual order. The resurrection of Yeshua ensures us that we ourselves will one day be resurrected. Yet at the same time, if we are to be resurrected from the dead—and the Bible places a significant emphasis on the Kingdom to come—should this not also affect how we accomplish the Lord’s purposes now in the present age? **As citizens of the Kingdom to come, are we not to demonstrate its qualities and characteristics *today*?** This not only involves declaring the message of Yeshua’s salvation to the lost perishing in sin—but also involves caring for the poor, destitute, homeless, sick, hungry,

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<sup>122</sup> N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), pp 40, 41.

<sup>123</sup> For a further discussion, consult the article “To Be Absent From the Body” by J.K. McKee.

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imprisoned, and all others who are abused and suffering. If Yeshua sacrificed Himself to atone for our sins, then being transformed by the message of the cross, Messiah's followers should truly try to give of themselves in some way by serving Him and demonstrating His love.

Today's evangelical Christianity tends to rightly emphasize the gravity of the cross, how the Messiah has been sacrificed for our sins and resurrected from the dead, and how this reality is to change people both in their relationship to God and one another. Today's Messianic community, for a variety of reasons, tends to not often discuss the death and resurrection of the Lord—either during the Passover season or outside of it. While some of it might be due to the fact that Messianic thanatology (study of death) is underdeveloped, it probably has more to do with an aversion to some of the traditions of Easter Sunday than anything else. The resurrection of Yeshua is frequently associated with that word "Easter," and so various Messianic Believers feel content with really not discussing His resurrection at any time during the season of Passover and Unleavened Bread, much less during the rest of the year.

There are Messianic Believers who have honestly tried to help evangelical Christians who remember Easter Sunday, to what they believe is a more Biblical remembrance: what they call the "Festival of First Fruits." Adhering to the Saddusaical reckoning of counting the *omer* toward *Shavuot*/Pentecost (cf. Leviticus 23:11), which would begin on the first Sunday during the week of Unleavened Bread, various Messianics assume that the early Church got this "Festival of First Fruits" mixed up with what would later become Easter Sunday. Today's Messianic community, it is believed, has a responsibility on the first Sunday during the week of Unleavened Bread to honor Yeshua's resurrection. Frequently, but not always, this will align with Easter Sunday.

No one can deny the Biblical reality that Yeshua is "the first fruits of those who are asleep," being the first in the order of those who are to be resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23). There is a typological connection to be made between Yeshua's resurrection and the offering of the *omer reishet* (עֹמֶר רֵאשִׁית) or sheaf of firstfruits (Leviticus 23:10).<sup>124</sup> As David H. Stern has rightly noted, "Sha'ul probably wrote this letter between *Pesach* (5:6-8) and *Shavu'ot* (16:8), during the season for presenting the **firstfruits** of the harvest at the Temple (Leviticus 23:9-15)."<sup>125</sup> But even while there can be no doubting the connection between the sheaf offering and Yeshua's resurrection, the Torah does not specify that this is to occur in conjunction with any holiday known as "*Chag HaBikkurim*" or the "Festival of First

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<sup>124</sup> Cf. Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 209.

<sup>125</sup> Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 488.

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Fruits.” The Torah knows of a *Chag haKatzir* (חַג הַקָּצִיר), a synonym for *Shavuot* (Exodus 23:16), and also how *Shavuot* is known as *yom ha'bikkurim* (יּוֹם הַבִּקּוּרִים).<sup>126</sup> In contrast, the offering up of the sheaf or *omer* of firstfruits at Unleavened Bread, while being a distinct and special ceremony associated with the Passover season, is not viewed as being any kind of separate holiday.

While I can surely empathize with Messianics who want their Christian brethren to be able to easily understand Yeshua’s resurrection—simply transferring an Easter Sunday remembrance now into a “First Fruits” Sunday remembrance—things are really not as simplistic as this. The Biblical data for the counting of the *omer* (Leviticus 23:11, MT compare LXX; Deuteronomy 16:9) really does not lend strong support for the Saddusaical method of starting on the first Sunday of the week of Unleavened Bread. The historical data we have recognizes that most of the Jews in the Second Temple period began the counting of the *omer* on the 16th of Nisan, according to the Pharisaical method of starting on the day after the High Sabbath (Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 3.250-251; Philo *Special Laws* 2.162). And, the Apostle Paul—who affirmed that Yeshua was firstfruits of the resurrection—was a Pharisee by virtue of belief in the resurrection (Acts 23:6), something which the Sadducees fully denied (Matthew 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 20:27; Acts 23:8). Given Yeshua’s endorsement of Pharisaic authority in many matters of *halachah* (Matthew 23:2-3), it seems quite improbable that either the Lord or His Apostles would have followed the Saddusaical reckoning of counting the *omer*.

So how does Yeshua fulfill the offering of firstfruits? As we have previously noted, the Fourth Gospel makes explicit reference to Yeshua’s death being associated with the Passover lamb, with Torah instructions referred to (John 19:36; cf. Exodus 12:46; Numbers 9:12)—which gives strong support to Him being executed in conjunction with the Passover lambs killed on the 14th of Nisan. Paul’s passing references in 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23 to Yeshua’s resurrection being firstfruits, is all we see in the Apostolic Scriptures, so we cannot similarly insist upon Yeshua resurrecting from the dead on the actual day the sheaf of firstfruits would be offered. And, when this was offered depends very much on the chronology one posits for the Passover the year of Yeshua’s death, and whether the Saddusaical or Pharisaical method was followed in the Temple precincts—something likely determined by the politics of the Sanhedrin.

Messianics who hold to the traditional Good Friday-Easter Sunday chronology, or those such as ourselves who hold to a Thursday crucifixion, both recognize that the 16th of Nisan would have been Saturday. The major difference between these two views is that the first posits a 15th of Nisan

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<sup>126</sup> Cf. “firstfruits,” in *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, 228.

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death for the Lord, as a festal offering, and the second posits a 14th of Nisan death for the Lord, as a Passover offering. The Pharisaic counting of the *omer* would have officially started on the 16th of Nisan, a weekly Sabbath, occurring after the High Sabbath on the 15th of Nisan. The Saddusaical counting of the *omer*, beginning on the Sunday after the weekly Sabbath, would have started on the 17th of Nisan.

The difference between the Pharisaical and Saddusaical reckonings for counting the *omer*, the year of Yeshua's death, would have only been one day. As we have concluded that Yeshua was probably resurrected as the Sabbath closed on the 16th of Nisan, this places Yeshua's resurrection right after the official start of the Pharisaical count and right before the official start of the Saddusaical count. Obviously, Yeshua can easily fulfill the typology of firstfruits if He were resurrected immediately before or immediately after the offering up of the sheaf in the Temple—regardless of which method is followed. However, we are justified to acknowledge that the Pharisaic method was probably followed in the Temple, as the Pharisees had the people at large on their side, and the Sadducees did not, in spite of any objection by the Sadducees.<sup>127</sup>

Things get a little complicated, though, when we see that in the Second Temple period, the Pharisaical Sages were debating whether or not it was actually work to gather the barley for the sheaf of the firstfruits offering on a Sabbath day. The Talmud records this debate:

"Said R. Hiyya bar Abba said R. Yohanan, 'Not for all purposes did R. Eliezer say, "What is required to make it possible to carry out a religious duty overrides the restrictions of the Sabbath," for lo, the two loaves represent the obligation of the day, and R. Eliezer derives the rule [that baking them overrides the restrictions of the Sabbath] only from an argument based on a verbal analogy [rather than holding that just as the duty is to put them out as an offering to the Lord, so baking them, necessary to carry out that duty, is permitted on the Sabbath as well]. *For it has been taught on Tannaite authority*: R. Eliezer says, 'How do we know that what is needed for the preparation of the two loaves of bread [as well as the actual rite itself] overrides the Sabbath? We find a reference to "bringing" in connection with the presentation of the first sheaf of barley, and we find the same word in connection with the two loaves of bread. Just as the use of the word "bringing" in connection with the presentation of the first sheaf of barley indicates that preparation for the rite, not only the rite itself, overrides the restrictions of the Sabbath, so the presence of the word "bringing" stated with respect to the two loaves of bread

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<sup>127</sup> Cf. Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 220.

See Edersheim's further remarks in *The Temple*, pp 203-204.

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indicates that the same rule applies, so that preparing for the rite overrides the restrictions of the Sabbath” (b.*Shabbat* 131a).<sup>128</sup>

“Said Rabbah bar Hannah said R. Yohanan, ‘R. Eleazar b. R. Simeon follows the principle of R. Aqiba, his father’s master. *For we have learned in the Mishnah*: An operative principle did R. Aqiba state, “Any sort of labor [in connection with circumcision] which it is possible to do on the eve of the Sabbath does not override [the restrictions of] the Sabbath, and that which it is not possible to do on the eve of the Sabbath does override [the prohibitions of] the Sabbath” [M. Shab. 19:1]. *And he furthermore takes the position of R. Ishmael, who has said that reaping the barley for the sheaf of first barley is a religious duty. For we have learned in the Mishnah*: R. Ishmael says, “[Rather the verse teaches us that] just as ploughing, [which] is a voluntary act, [is prohibited on the Sabbath] so [only] harvesting [which likewise] is voluntary [is prohibited on the Sabbath]. This excludes harvesting the first sheaf [and is therefore permitted even on the Sabbath]” [M. Shebiit 1:4K-L]. *Now if you were to imagine that if the barley for the sheaf of first barley that has not been reaped in accord with the religious duty that pertains to it is valid, why in the world should it override the Sabbath? Do it the eve of the Sabbath. And since it does override the restrictions of the Sabbath, it must follow that he holds that if it was reaped not in accordance with its prescribed rite, it is invalid*” (b.*Menachot* 72a).<sup>129</sup>

Keep in mind that the discussion seen above took place several centuries after the time of Yeshua. By this time, the Rabbis clearly ruled that “*Doesn’t he also know that the act of slaughtering the animal always has overridden the prohibitions of the Sabbath? So it must follow that Rabbi takes the view that reaping the barley for the first sheaf of grain does not override the prohibitions of the Sabbath*” (b.*Menachot* 72a).<sup>130</sup> By the Third-Fifth Centuries C.E., the Rabbis considered gathering the barley to offer before the Lord on the weekly Sabbath to not be “work.” Yet, in the First Century the discussion was still probably going on and had not been finalized.

The fact that the question “Is offering the barley sheaf before God work if performed on the Sabbath?” was asked does leave us the distinct possibility that in the First Century, it **may have been considered work**. The Rabbis are reflecting centuries later, and leave us a unique window whereby Yeshua can fulfill the firstfruits expectations of *both* the Sadducees and Pharisees for the specific year of His death. It is possible, however infrequent, that the Pharisees could have started their *omer* count on a Sunday, should their actual

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<sup>128</sup> *The Babylonian Talmud: A Translation and Commentary.*

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

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first day occur on a weekly Sabbath after a High Sabbath on Friday. Note that this would have occurred during a time when the Sadducees controlled the Temple, with constant friction occurring between the two parties in the Sanhedrin. Even with the people on their side, the Pharisees had to make concessions just as the Sadducees—probably when their respective *omer* counts began so close together.

In this case, on the year of Yeshua's death, the Pharisaic *omer* count could have begun on the 17th of Nisan. The reason is simply that enough Pharisees might have considered it work to gather the sheaf for the offering on a weekly Sabbath, something needing to be postponed until the following day. With the Pharisees and Sadducees following the same *omer* count for this year, a level of civility could be maintained between these two rival factions.

The Gospels depict that although the Sadducees had the most to gain by Yeshua's death, that there were Pharisees involved in the conspiracy as well (Matthew 27:62; John 18:3). If the *omer* count for both the Sadducees and Pharisees began on the Sunday following Yeshua's resurrection—then both parties would have had something communicated to them. If the Roman soldier at the foot of the cross could recognize that something supernatural was afoot (Mark 15:39; Matthew 27:54; Luke 23:47), then it is not difficult to extrapolate how unique circumstances on the year of Yeshua's death and resurrection could have communicated something to both the Sadducees and Pharisees as they began the counting of the *omer* together.

If the counting of the *omer* for both the Sadducees and Pharisees began on the Sunday after Yeshua's resurrection, it would only have been because of unique circumstances that one year. We do not have grounds to disregard both the Biblical and historical evidence that points to the Pharisaical method actually being the best interpretive option for the counting of the *omer*. The Messiah would not have endorsed the Torah views of an utterly corrupt sect of Judaism that categorically denied the doctrine of resurrection,<sup>131</sup> and Paul's claim before the Sanhedrin of what we see transcribed as *egō Pharisaios eimi* (ἐγὼ Φαρισαῖός εἰμι)—“I am a Pharisee” (Acts 23:6)—is a strong indication that he would have followed the 16th of Nisan start of the *omer* count (cf. Acts 20:16) in normal years. Today's broad Messianic movement will have to learn how to properly balance the unique circumstances of the year Yeshua died and was resurrected, and how to observe the counting of the *omer* and

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<sup>131</sup> Ancient Jewish theology actually held that the Sadducees' denial of the resurrection would exclude them from a place in the Kingdom to come (m.*Sanhedrin* 10:1).

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*Shavuot* on the same traditional dates as the worldwide Jewish community, which today follows the Pharisaical reckoning.<sup>132</sup>

### Arriving at a Consensus?

There is a great deal of data and perspectives that have to be weighed in determining a proper chronology for Yeshua's death, burial, and resurrection. What we can all agree on for certain is that by Sunday morning Joseph of Arimathea's tomb had been vacated, and by Sunday evening the risen Lord appeared to His Disciples. Other than this, the Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday crucifixion scenarios each have their own pros and cons that you have to be aware of, in considering which you think best fits:

#### A Wednesday Crucifixion

**PROS:** guided by doing justice to Yeshua's reference to being dead "three days and three nights" (Matthew 12:40)

**CONS:** the Marys should have gone to the empty tomb on Thursday evening or Friday morning to anoint Yeshua's body, as the High Sabbath of Passover would be over, and not Sunday morning as is testified in all four Gospels (Mark 16:2; Matthew 28:1-2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1)

#### A Thursday Crucifixion

**PROS:** a chronology between Thursday afternoon and Saturday evening involves three daylight periods and three dusk periods, even though it is not a full 72 hours, in recognition that the Lord would be resurrected by the third day (cf. Hosea 6:1-2),<sup>133</sup> Yeshua is executed before the High Sabbath of Passover and the weekly Sabbath; the resurrection occurs after the official *omer* count for the Pharisees has started, and before the official *omer* count of the Sadducees begins

**CONS:** posits that the Day of Preparation and the Sabbath affects both a High Sabbath for the week of Passover on Friday, and then a normal weekly Sabbath on Saturday—a two day "Sabbath period" so to speak

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<sup>132</sup> Consult the FAQ, "Omer Count" (reproduced in this publication's section on "FAQs on the Spring Holiday Season"). Also consult the article "Sadducees, Pharisees, and the Controversy of Counting the Omer" by J.K. McKee.

<sup>133</sup> Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; 27:64; Luke 9:22; 18:33; 24:7, 21, 46; Acts 10:40.

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### A Friday Crucifixion

**PROS:** the traditional view adhered to in most of today's Christianity, and Messianic teachers can simply help enrich Christians' Hebraic Roots without having to go into many specifics; points out how that "three days and three nights" does not necessarily have to be a full 72 hours

**CONS:** unless Yeshua celebrated His Passover *seder* earlier than most everyone else, on the 13th of Nisan, then Yeshua's Passover offering of Himself is probably not on the afternoon of the 14th of Nisan leading into Passover (John 19:36), but on the 15th of Nisan as a festal offering; "the day of preparation for the Passover" (John 19:14) is not the eve of the 14th of Nisan, but is rather a complicated way of saying "the day of preparation for the weekly Sabbath during the Passover season"; Yeshua's execution on the 15th of Nisan can raise some questions, as it would have been the High Sabbath of Passover

Evaluating the different points of view, I have concluded that the **Thursday crucifixion scenario** does the most amount of justice to the information. If this needs adjusting in the future, because of new data or perspectives to be considered, then I am certainly open to revising my conclusions. But this article has tried to focus on the events surrounding the death, burial, and resurrection of Messiah Yeshua *more than anything else*. As I noted at the beginning, affirming that our Messiah and Savior died and rose again is a salvation issue; how this all actually happened in a day-to-day sequence is not. I will certainly not look at those Messianics who are sincerely convicted that a Wednesday or Friday crucifixion scenario is best, as though they somehow deny Yeshua's prophetic fulfillment of the Passover.

In favoring the Thursday scenario, while the Biblical and historical data does affect my deliberations, I am also very much guided by a missional ethos surrounding the sacrifice and resurrection of the Lord. **I am most inclined to favor the chronology where the most amount of people are going to take notice of what is happening.** This means that when the Temple curtain is ripped in two, the time it can make the most sizeable impact is during the sacrifice of the main Passover lamb between 2:30-3:30 on the 14th of Nisan, and not a festal offering later. Similarly, if because of circumstance the Pharisaical and Saddusaical *omer* counts had to begin on the same day, both of these two sects that played some role in the Lord's death would have something communicated to them, as word would get back to them about the

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empty tomb as the firstfruits ceremony commenced. Surely, if the sky blackening and the ground shaking communicated something to the pagan Romans present—then there are specific, Biblically-rooted signs that would communicate important things to the Jews present.

I know that the information and perspectives I have provided in this article will not at all be the end of this discussion. But, I do hope that we will all learn **not** to approach Yeshua's prophetic fulfillment of the Passover season—by His Last Supper, His atoning sacrifice for us, and His resurrection—in a simplistic manner. *We cannot allow ourselves to think that Yeshua's Passover chronology of fulfillment can be presented in a nice, clean-cut package with a big bow on it any more.* There are pieces of information that have been left out of our deliberations for far too long. Any binary thinking we have adopted of prophetic fulfillment in 0s and 1s needs to now be jettisoned.

It is my hope that when we discuss this subject in the future, we will approach it in an honest and constructive spirit of inquiry, where we are all respectful to one another and **we really can focus on the substance of what happened.** I would especially like to see all of the rigidity witnessed in recent years to be retired to the past, and for more moderate voices to control the conversation, in order to bring honor and glory to the Lord.

### What Really Matters!

How is today's Messianic community to properly proceed during the season of Passover? We will certainly hear a great number of teachings about the original Passover, and the deliverance of Ancient Israel from Egypt. Will this be mirrored with an emphasis on the Lamb of God, Messiah Yeshua, and how final redemption has been secured by His death? Will anyone hear about the events surrounding His resurrection? What will your Passover *seder* look like? If you are a Messianic congregational or fellowship leader, you are responsible for conveying to those you serve an adequate and appropriate understanding of **all the relevant Biblical events** regarding this sacred season of the year.

Admittedly, unlike our Christian brethren who have a somewhat packaged weekend from Good Friday to Easter Sunday, our remembrance of Messiah Yeshua in the Passover *seder*, and our retelling of the events, might not have such a day-to-day sequence. We will have to speak more in terms of the "Passover season," and not overlook the various elements of either the *seder* or Yeshua's suffering for us which affect us as people of faith. We have the awesome opportunity to really plow into the Scriptures, and significantly focus on why the Lord died for us, on many different levels. We really get to understand how the capital punishments of the Torah have been absorbed in His sacrifice (Colossians 2:14), and memorialize what took place with far more

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elements than just bread and wine. We get to consider Yeshua in the scope of the Exodus message, and realize that without His blood covering us, we all stand as unregenerate and condemned sinners.

Will we heed the call, and learn to proclaim that simple, yet quite profound message of deliverance available to all people?

"[I]f you confess with your mouth Yeshua as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, 'WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED' [Isaiah 28:16]. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for 'WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED' [Joel 2:32]" (Romans 10:9-13).